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THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

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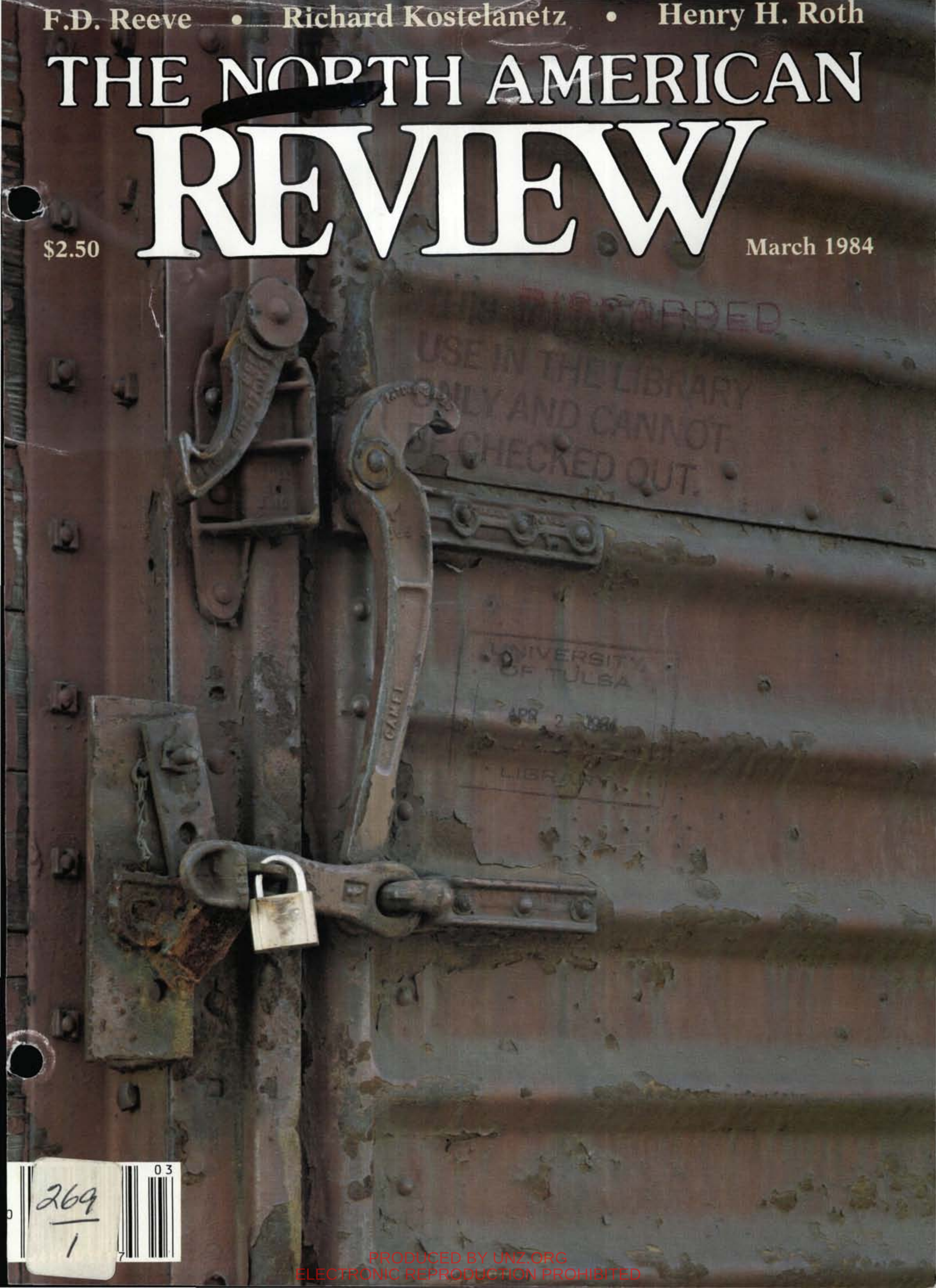

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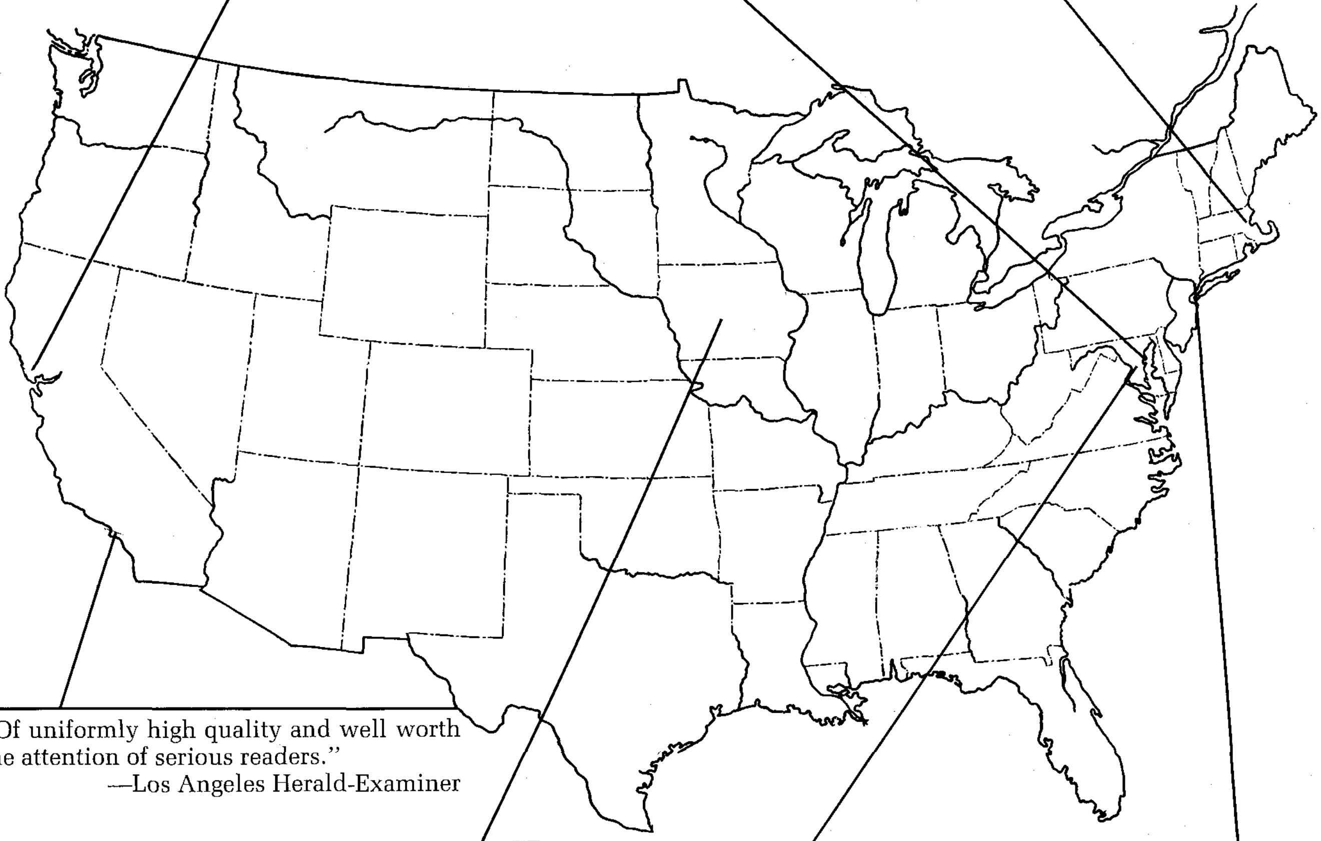

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Long winters make us edgy—when *will* spring arrive, anyway?—and perhaps the edginess accounts for some of the contents of this 169th Anniversary number of the NAR. We find ourselves looking for escapes, diversions, a way out; 'enough of politics,' we say, coming out of our caucus last month carrying the fond hope that Walter Mondale will stop being a mere politician, that Ronald Reagan's sincerity will be perceived as the jovial ignorance it is; 'enough solemnity,' we say, watching television treat the winter Olympics as a fevered exercise in nationalism, instead of the joyous play of exhilarated men and women; 'enough fear,' we say, reading that a majority of junior high school children believe they will die in a nuclear war within the next ten years. Enough winter, indeed.

Thus: a reincarnation of "Unclassifieds"—a catch-all of laments, observances and wry interpretations of the world that are neither fiction nor poetry nor familiar essay (as we now know them)—to which we commend your bemusement. Thus: a nursery tale quite unfit for the nursery, spun by Erica Liederman; bird-lovers, beware. Thus: a varied assortment of stories by familiar names and newcomers. Thus: a consideration of the literary scene in Germany—both West and East—by Richard Kostelanetz. And finally, thus: a return to the truths of the wintry world, with Scott Sanders' examination of the fascination guns exert upon the male imagination at—as all wars remind us—a Very Early Age.

Some postscripts: The New Jersey State Museum (205 West State Street, Trenton, NJ 08625) has published *Jacob Landau: The Graphic Work*, a large-format paperback containing a *catalogue raisonné* and other materials treating Landau's work. The book carries 216 black-and-white reproductions—including the "Inferno" series which appeared originally in the NAR—and sells for $10. . . . Molly Giles and Mary Hood, both recent contributors, are among winners of this year's Flannery O'Connor fiction awards; both will have story collections published by the University of Georgia Press.

★ THE NORTH AMERICAN ★

REVIEW

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Literary Berlin

A little over a half-century ago, Berlin was one of the great literary cities of the world. Here lived the playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht and the novelist Alfred Döblin, whose forgotten classic *Alexanderplatz Berlin* (1929) had as its protagonist the city itself. Here lived the critics Walter Benjamin and Carl Einstein; here Herwarth Walden edited *Der Sturm*, which was one of the great avant-garde magazines of its time. Here had Dada thrived, albeit briefly. Not only was the best literary review of the 1920s, *Die literarische Welt*, published in Berlin, but so was the most snobbish, *Querschnitt* (meaning, literally, *cross-section*). The legendary Wieland Herzfelde began his publishing career in Berlin in the 1920s; S. Fischer Verlag was already established here. Glorious though it was, this literary Berlin emigrated or succumbed in the wake of Adolf Hitler's accession to power.

Postwar Berlin has been something else—a divided city, one part a Western oasis under the control of the occupying powers of the West (America, Britain and France) and the other the capital of a satellite state. Of the writers who had made Berlin so important in the pre-Hitler period, only Brecht returned, a shadow of his former self—not to the West but the East, where a theater called the Berliner Ensemble was established especially for him. The old publishing houses (except Ullstein) left Berlin for the increasingly prosperous, though smaller cities of Western Germany—Frankfurt, Cologne, Hamburg and Munich. "It is a dying city," the West Berlin cultural critic Roland Wiegenstein told me, "and dying cities have a special perfume. And since it is dying slowly, it will be a good place to live for a hundred years."

This West Berlin is officially tied to West Germany, which is, however, another place—over a hundred miles to the west and yet further to the south, at least thirty minutes by airplane and several hours by road or train. It is not for nothing that West Berliners customarily speak of "traveling to West Germany," as though it were another country. Nonetheless, West Germany supports Berlin as the Western outpost in the East—supports it with tax deductions, fellowship programs, cultural subsidies and wage increments, among other, sometimes more subtle devices.

Here it is commonly understood that cultural activities that are not commercially viable must be subsidized, not only for their own sake, but for the sake of the city's survival in this hostile Communist sea. The Deutsches Opera receives a subsidy that accounts for nearly 90% of its total budget—the highest percentage of subsidy for any theater in Germany. The major theatres of West Berlin are comparably subsidized. Since commercial publishing is disadvantageous in Berlin (given the costs and obstacles of shipping books through the hostile sea), publicly funded institutions arose to fill the slack. The principal one has been the Literarisches Colloquium, an organization without peer elsewhere in Germany or in the U.S. It was founded by Walter Höllerer, himself a poet, playwright, critic and the co-founding editor of the literary magazine *Akzente*, as well as the former head of the language department of the local Technical University. Under his guidance, the Literarisches Colloquium sponsors readings and conferences; it publishes not only a series of small-format books of poetry and prose but larger books that sometimes draw upon its seminars (such as a continuing one on "Literature in the Technological Age"). It also has a film studio to produce both films and television programs about literature. All this is housed in an elegant mansion on one of Berlin's handsomest lakes, the Wannsee. Though the Literarisches Colloquium may not be as influential as it was a dozen years ago, without it Berlin today would be a different literary place. Its funds come mostly from the city's Senator (Ministry) für Wissenschaft und Kulturelle Angelegenheiten (Cultural Affairs). The literature director is Dietger Pforte, an earnest young man who formerly lectured on literature at Berlin's Free University. From his office high in the Europa Center, he explained how the Berlin Senate supports, on an annual budget of a million marks ($400,000), a range of programs: stipends for young writers (including Berliners who write in Turkish or English), grants to five young German-language authors from elsewhere (to spend five months apiece at the Literarisches Colloquium), funds to bring foreign writers to Berlin, travel funds for Berlin writers to go abroad, several literary prizes, publications funds for books that would not otherwise appear, festivals of esoteric literature (e.g., Icelandic, Croatian), an annual book entitled *Ex Libris—Berliner Bücherform* that reprints poems and stories by local writers in addition to advertisements by local publishers announcing their recent titles, and 25 Christmas presents of 400 Deutschmarks apiece to indigent writers. Not unlike literature program directors here, Pforte complains that funds allocated to his department are only 1% of the total allotted to Berlin's performing arts.

The single most famous author of postwar Berlin has been Günter Grass. Born in Danzig (now called Gdansk) in 1929, he came to Berlin after the War and attended its arts college. His first novel, *The Tin Drum* (1959), made him not only an international celebrity but the de facto spokesman for younger Berlin intellectuals. When the East Germans built a wall to divide the city in 1961, it was Grass who appeared on television and Grass who organized an international writers protest (to no avail). From time to time he has also campaigned strenuously for his Social Democrat comrade Willy Brandt. Most of his attention has gone to producing a continuous stream of novels, poems, plays and essays, in addition to visual art that is frequently exhibited. Grass still maintains a residence here, as well as a secretary and an administrator for the Alfred Döblin literary prize that he personally funds; but since his divorce a few years ago, he has lived mostly in the West German countryside south of Hamburg.

Because only a few can depend upon the literary marketplace for a secure source of income, most Berlin poets, fictioneers and critics do other things. A few like Höllerer teach in the universities, but academic jobs for writers are scarcer here than in the U.S. (Germany has yet to discover creative-writing programs). Some writers work regularly for the newspapers or the radio stations. Some, like the poets Rolf Haufs or Aras Oren, are full-time producers at Sender Freies Berlin (Radio Free Berlin). Both it and RIAS (Radio in the American Sector) broadcast readings by local writers in addition to book reviews and radio essays. All German stations produce *hörspiele* (hear-plays) by contemporary writers. In Germany, radio stations generally pay better than even the slickest magazines.

Even though Berlin is not what it was, and even though it is geographically inconvenient, it still attracts writers. Over 250 of some note live among its two million, and that ratio is higher than anywhere else in Germany. Some are here because they were born here. Others came because it remains Germany's largest city, with the most cultivated population and most permissive atmosphere. Fred Viebahn, a novelist born in 1947, came to Berlin from Cologne at the end of the 1960s. "I thought it was the most lively city in Germany, the youngest in spirit. The enclosed situation of the two worlds confronting each other was very creative for me at the beginning." Mechthild Rausch, a critic from Hamburg who has lived in Berlin since 1966, says, "Here you can see where the great modern writers and artists lived; that would be impossible in the thoroughly rebuilt cities of the West. We are a divided country, but only Berlin is a divided city. Therefore, in Berlin you experience the German situation." Some came to connect themselves to its avant-garde tradition. Three leading members of the Vienna Group settled here in the 1960s—H.C. Artmann, Gerhard Rühm and Oswald Wiener—and it was here that Rühm edited his monumental anthology of the group's activities (1967) and Wiener lived when his major novel, *The Improvement of Central Europe* (1969), was published. Many regard Wiener's book as the most consequential German experimental fiction of the past two decades. It begins with an index and closes with three appendices and a bibliography. Its pages have Roman numerals. It mixes styles and genres in ways both pretentious and comic. Parts appeared here a decade ago, in Joachin Neugroschel's translation; it all should appear before we die.

The Israeli historian Gershom Scholem, who left in 1923, came back to Berlin for a residency two autumns ago, a few months before his death, showing his wife where he wrote his first book, where he did his first translations, where his parents were buried. The novelist Edgar Hilsenrath came here after 25 years in New York. Born in Leipzig in 1928, he settled in the U.S. in 1951, but since he wrote only in German, he wanted to return to a German-speaking country. Some of his belongings were mailed to Munich; others to Berlin. He chose Berlin. "It is the only German city where you don't feel you're among beer-drinking Germans." *Night,* a novel based upon his concentration camp experiences, disappeared soon after its New York publication (in Michael Roloff's translation). A decade later, it became a best-seller in Germany. A journeyman in New York, Hilsenrath is now a celebrity in Berlin, able to live off his royalties.

More than any other German city, perhaps even more than Paris, Berlin attracts writers who were born some place else and often write in languages other than German: Günter Grass from Danzig, the poet Oskar Pastior from German-speaking Rumania, Aras Oren and Güney Dal from Turkey, the novelist Jeanette Lander from Atlanta, Georgia. Emmett Williams, the American concrete poet, recently established permanent residence here while a retrospective of his visual art travels around Europe. One of the two editors of *Litfass,* the principal local literary magazine, is a Bulgarian. Christopher Middleton, a British poet presently residing in Texas, is a member of the Akademie der Künst's literature section. This hospitality to the avant-garde and to foreigners is scarcely new to Berlin, which easily integrates exotic outsiders into its cultural life. It was here, after all, that Edgard Varese, L. Moholy-Nagy, W.H. Auden, and Christopher Isherwood spent some formative years.

Emmett Williams is one of many foreign writers who first came to Berlin as guests of the DAAD Kunstlerprogramm which, since the early 1960s, has offered residencies to 25 artists from around the world. Traditionally, five of the number have been writers, five visual artists and five composers. (The others are nowadays filmmakers, video artists, and architects.) Among the writers recently resident here were Michel Butor, Witold Gombrowicz, Milan Kundera, Stanislaw Lem, Maria Vargas Llosa and Dick Higgins. Some, like Williams, as well as the playwrights George Tabori and Anthony Ingrassia, elect to make Berlin their principal home.

As all but one of the publishing conglomerates are now in West Germany, Berlin's publishers tend to be small and specialized. Klaus Wagenbach, formerly a Kafka biographer, founded twenty years ago a firm that bears his name, and he has since specialized in leftish writers, not only for Marxist criticism but for poetry and fiction. His company and its dissident offspring, Rotbuch Verlag (a radical commune), are the only local firms profitable enough to support several people. The others are small publishers in the American sense, run by only a few people who do all the work. Medusa Verlag has recently been issuing the collected works of Carl Einstein (1885-1940), a Berlin Jewish writer who wrote a pioneering book on African art and an even more pioneering cubist novel (that remains untranslated). Merveverlag specializes in small-format paperbacks on avant-garde art and cultural theory. Karen Kramer Verlag deals in anarchism. Elefantinpress recently published a large book about John Heartfield (1898-1968), the Berlin photomontagist who was perhaps Marxism's (and East Germany's) greatest visual artist. Renate Gerhardt, the widow of the poet Rainer Gerhardt (immortalized in a Charles Olson poem), has produced volumes of art and literature for over two decades. Like all good alternative publishers, these smaller firms issue books, and kinds of books, that the bigger boys would not touch. When many Berlin writers discovered, much as American writers have, that their books were not in the local bookstores or were rapidly rushed out of print, several of them founded, in 1976, a cooperative Autorenbuchhandlung, an authors' bookstore, that would carry *all* their own books. "The idea of it was in the air," Fred Viebahn remembers. "Once we decided to do it, it happened quickly." Each member invested a thousand Deutschemarks, which can be retrieved should any of the 150 sponsors decide to resign from the cooperative. With a table in the back and a tea-kettle on a hot plate, the shop also serves as a kind of clubhouse which has a gathering, attended by a dozen or two, every Saturday afternoon. There are similar Autorenbuchhandlung in Munich and Frankfurt, and ought to be comparable shops in the States.

Because West Berlin is still officially occupied territory (and *not* West Germany), its younger residents cannot be drafted into the German military. As a result, Berlin has 70,000 officially registered students—more per capita than any other German city—in addition to ex-students, lapsed-students and bohemians. Among them, needless to say, are a large number of aspiring poets and fictioneers who, not unlike their kind elsewhere, found magazines, publish small editions and read their poems in coffee houses, among other venues. Some of the more interesting of the new magazines are *KULTuhr*, edited and designed by Norbert Tefelski, and *Gepin*, a large-format, informal collection of art and writing co-edited by Rolf-Peter Baacke, who also edited the first volume of the Carl Einstein retrospective. Many younger poets, mostly unknown, were collected in a populous anthology entitled simply *Berlin*, edited, translated and introduced by Mitch Cohen, himself a young American living in Berlin and writing poetry in both English and German. The book's publisher is, to no surprise, an American small press—Mudborn of Santa Barbara.

If West Berlin's literature is state-supported, that on the other side of the Berlin wall is state-*supervised*, which means that, as in Russia, not only the literary magazines but the publishing houses are wholly bankrolled and controlled by state organizations. In some respects, East Berlin is a typical Communist literary scene. When the poet Wolf Biermann became too much of a public nuisance, he was expelled, and those East German writers who protested the Biermann expulsion were themselves granted "exit visas," sometimes for as long as several years. While Biermann himself settled in Hamburg, others, among them Klaus Schlesinger, Jurek Becker, and Thomas Brasch, chose to settle in West Berlin.

Once on the other side, Brasch and Becker became better friends, and I met them together. Born in London in 1945, of Jewish refugee parents, Brasch came to Germany after the War and grew up in East Berlin. He worked as a translator and in factories. He published thirty poems. In 1968, he went to prison for distributing leaflets protesting the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. In 1977, he published a collection of stories with Rotbuch, *Before the Fathers the Sons Die.* Challenged by the East German authorities to retract the book or go West, he chose the latter. The British ambassador, remembering his birthplace, gave him a passport. A nervous, energetic man, Brasch has since produced plays, novels, films and photographic books based on his films. Brasch now lives in West Berlin because he would rather not be a West German. "Berlin is not a part of this rich, fat, petit bourgeois country. It's like a railroad station. There's nothing permanent about it."

The position of Jurek Becker is more subtle. Born in Lodz, Poland, in 1937, of a Jewish family that survived Hitler's concentration camps intact, he too grew up in East Berlin, served in its military and even paid dues to the Communist Party from 1955 to 1974. Having protested the expulsion of his old friend Wolf Biermann, Becker was given a three-year exit visa. Thanks to the success of his first novel, *Jacob the Liar* (1969), which appeared in English translation in 1975 (and reminded reviewers of Sholem Alechem), Becker's first year out was spent teaching at Oberlin College (where Fred Viebahn was also on the faculty). Returning home, he decided to settle instead in West Berlin, while remaining a citizen of East Germany. Indeed, in a city that asks everyone to take sides, he straddles the wall with sons on one side, a home on the other, and publishers as well as bank accounts on both. A ten-year visa has since replaced his three-year pass. An American university recently invited him to a symposium of German-language literature. Amongst a Swiss and an Austrian, Becker discovered he was chosen to do double-duty, representing both East Germany and West. "We thought we could save money," his hosts told him, "by inviting *you*."

Of the writers remaining in East Berlin, the most prominent are Christa Wolf, a poet in her early fifties whose books have been published in the U.S.; Robert Weimann, a scholar of English and American literature who is also first vice-president of the Akademie der Künst der DDR; and Stefan Heym, a genuinely popular, German-born novelist who came to the U.S. in 1935 and spent World War II in the U.S. Army. On the run from McCarthyism, Heym went to East Berlin in 1952, settling in Grunau, an outlying district, in the same modest detached house that he still occupies. Returning his American passport, he became an East German citizen and with his American-born wife founded Seven Seas, an English-language publishing house that issued "American authors who couldn't be published in the U.S." Until recently, Heym drafted his novels first in English and then prepared the German "versions" himself. (His last two novels were done under a reverse bilingual procedure.) On the porch of his house, he was quick to point out how East Berlin differs from other Eastern-bloc cities. Publishers give royalties on sales, in contrast to the Soviet system of paying a writer a lump sum based upon the size of his book. "Berlin's a divided city," Heym continues, "The influences from East and West interchange. It's very stimulating. If you imagined the United States divided, one side *real existierender Sozialismus* and the other side capitalist, and the line ran through Chicago, you'd have fun in Chicago." Nonetheless, because Heym published his last two novels in the West without official permission, "I was pulled into court; I was fined. Whether here or in America, every time a goddam stupid blockhead government gets into power, I get into trouble." He speaks contemptuously of "the good boys, writers whom the government likes. They get huge editions; they get emoluments and stipends. These are rich guys." What are their books like? "Uplifting," he replies. Curmudgeon though he be, Heym plans to stay here, "as long as nothing worse happens to me."

Another way that East Berlin differs from Moscow, say, is that its writers go often to the West. Robert Weimann was in Toronto in spring, 1982, holding the Northrop Frye Chair of Literary Theory. Stefan Heym starred at the Frankfurt Book Fair the previous fall. The poet Stephan Hermlin belongs to the West Berlin Akademie der Künst in addition to that in East Berlin. (The latter pays its members a salary, 800 Eastmarks a month; the former has meetings and parties.) The novelist Hermann Kant, president of the Writers Society (and a party member for the past 32 years), told me how much he enjoyed his eight-city lecture tour of America in 1980. Christa Wolf has taught at Oberlin, while the playwright Heiner Muller spent a semester at the University of Texas. In a city whose common citizens are forbidden to visit the West, even West Berlin—that's why the Wall—the writers have "privilege" of free passage.

Comparing professional life in East Berlin with West, Jurek Becker told me that even though the retail price of books is much less in East Berlin than in West, the editions are much larger in the East, and the royalties to authors are also higher (15%, rather than 10%). Since the cost of living is cheaper in the East than in the West, the number of fulltime professionals is proportionately greater. Also, members of the Writers Society can get from the state enough money to sustain a year or two of fulltime work. "One problem," Becker continues, "is that once a book is sold out in the East, it is not automatically reprinted. The more the Party likes you, the sooner you get a second edition." Such decisions are made by publishing executives who are responsible to the cultural ministries. Hermann Kant cited another difference. "Here society is more interested in literature. The main difference is that we believe here in miracles, that literature is another form of magic. On the other side, they are indifferent."

While Berlin today is not the Berlin of the past, now, so physically isolated and yet so culturally sophisticated, it is a singular city and thus an interesting one, whose literary presence is stronger than any one or another of its writers; for here the issues of socialism and capitalism, of dreams and realities, of realism and fantasy, of new waves and old, of possibility and limitation, of state-support and total independence are played out every day in a single arena. Whatever is happening elsewhere in world literature is likely to happen in Berlin as well.

—Richard Kostelanetz

J.P. WHITE

THE POMEGRANATE TREE SPEAKS FROM THE DICTATOR'S GARDEN

"A few days after Somoza's assassination, the
huge tree in the palace garden sickened and died . . .
meanwhile people danced in the streets of Nicaragua."

On the forehead of a dancing people, drunk
With the death of Somoza, my leaves see
A constellation of blood. Each star,
A sparkle that divides by the claw.
Is tonight a fiesta or a forced march
Over the immensity of a mirror?
My roots, planted from seed and tended
By a man shot to kingdom-come,
Have heard laughter chased before
In the alley like lucky dice.
But what ever changes in the animal belly?
The people who wired the commandante's car
Do not polish my fruit with their images:
Spider-web spinners. Pronoun hunters.
Us. Them. Nobody. Somebody. Him.
Surrounded by a new string of flags,
My bark blackens with familiar readings
Of an anthem, implacable loves
Shining for all people. Then,
The tablecloth, the wine, the strummed guitar.
Tomorrow, the Chief will stumble over lines
Of his memorized poem.
                                        Up here, the first rays
Battle like transparent swords. Insects thrum
In my branches that have lived long with history's
Broken cart dragged over the orphan road.
For my part, my trunk prepares its own poem:
Mixed with dust and sadness, drawn from years
Alone in the garden, bearing witness to mules
Turning and turning around a ring for water.
What will my pomegranate poem say?
How no one caught the scent of quince and magnolia
Or brought one more chicken into the courtyard or saw
My candelabra of red jewels torched in the sun.

Home Thoughts for the Remotely Interested

Remember Simon, the surly and ambitious writer who lives in me and is always complaining of this and that not done for him, as if I were the building superintendent? Well, he was very pleased when I decided both to resign from teaching (more time for me, was surely his reaction) and to move east. The latter was even more pleasing to him—if he'd been Nero Wolfe he'd have said "Satisfactory," but of course he said nothing, laid low, played it cool. But how was it that the word "establishment" kept rising up, unsummoned as gas?

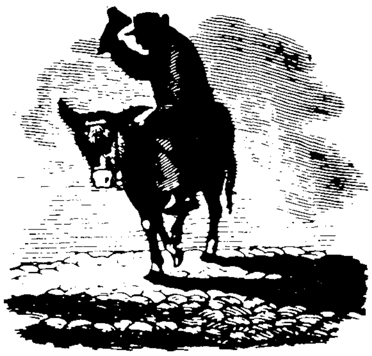
Nonetheless, he behaved pretty well during our early months on Cape Cod, not complaining about my attention to the details of settling in, not pushing when I gave him only a couple of hours a day. It seemed possible that he would at last mellow, as the aging are asked to do. I should have known better. Characters like Simon do not age, they rage. As he did when I pulled us up out of our writing chair and took us to New York to spend some time with friends. It was New Year's week.

And what a week it was. A confluence of good things. A San Francisco friend with a one-man show of paintings on 57th Street; a block east, a Soutine show of unsettling magnificence. Another friend in from the Bay Area, probably the best producer of radio drama in the U.S., and telling me now of invitations to Europe; we spent an evening in an upper west side studio like they don't make anymore (Des Artistes; you could grow a grapefruit tree in that light and space) with a lively, low-key group of readers and writers from various parts of the country all of whom, it turned out one by one, read *NAR*. Rosemary Harris was playing with Rex Harrison in Shaw's "Heartbreak House," tremendous vitality of play and players, then some time with her and her husband John Ehle, a top-notch novelist (read *The Winter People*). A visit with Dore Ashton, whose book on Rothko was just out. A dinner with a New York *Timesman* in a hidden Italian restaurant like a *trattoria* in Florence, the owner's dog sitting at the next table (ordering, I believe, *osso buco*). And so on, to a grand finale, with encore.

A good friend arranged that we attend a gala benefit concert for and at Carnegie Hall on New Year's eve. In a first-tier box. The program: Isaac Stern, Yo-Yo Ma, Emanuel Ax, Pinchas Zuckerman, Marilyn Horne, Orpheus. After the concert, the regular audience gone, we invited-folk assembled on stage for a champagne supper. At two minutes to twelve the house band came out to play Auld Lang Syne. It consisted of Isaac Stern, Yo-Yo Ma, and Emanuel Ax. Stern, who enjoys a bit of ham regardless, stomped his foot like any good fiddler; Ax let a cigarette dangle from the corner of his mouth and came on like Dooley Wilson in "Casablanca"; Ma picked up the cello and shoved it up to his chin.

And so a new year arrived, on schedule but with uncommon glitter.

Simon wanted to stay in New York. Among other things he had been standing around in bookstores sampling the intellectual press. "It can be like this all the time," he said. He never knows when he's had enough . . . for the simple reason that for him there never is, can never be, enough. Not because he's a hog, which he sometimes is, but because he's caught forever in art's struggle for better, which he is occasionally tempted to equate with more. So I took him home and he bitched all the way, accusing me of standing in the way of his career.



"Look at you," he said, "all tarted up in English clothes and Italian shoes and so at ease with high society it's disgusting; there's plenty of Eustace Tilley in you, sonny, so don't come all over the country-boy with me." Cute he was, with that Eustace Tilley crack (the monocled gent used as signature by *The New Yorker*, which had recently accepted a work of his). I didn't say anything, there's no arguing with him, and besides he's right in some ways. But I just wanted to get home and rest. My nerve-ends would be resonating for a month. My usual excitement these days is absently chewing on ideas searching for the flavor, and watching things grow. I couldn't wait to get back to the recliner next to a phone that rarely rings. Start the wood-fire, feed the birds, read the paper, walk the dog. Stare out the glass sliders.

Amtrak to Boston served as decompression chamber: gray drizzle down the windows; a dull girl as seat-partner, majoring in church history (Catholic) and flashing a *Reader's Digest* understanding of the Italian Renaissance; a Handi-Wrap sandwich of faded ham on tastefree bread as refreshment; somebody with a damned transistor radio on; a baby crying. Real life.

Who, given the choice, would opt for real life? Nobody, as television has proven. But which kind of unreal life had I chosen? Not just country, but space around like a moat. Riding forth on feast days to Camelot. I thought about the city writers and thinkers, the peculiar role they assign themselves and the energetic desperation with which many carry it off. Arbiters. Ar biters. Police dogs.

The particular scent of writer as intellectual cop is stronger in New York than bus fumes. The job is impressive, the workers often depressing. Their concerns are so broad and their area of activity so narrow, centered in the various critical reviews where with tenacious regularity differing words are spoken yet the sound is the same—an unmerry-go-round where which horse you're riding doesn't matter to the trip.

There's something embarrassingly typical in the voice. Certainly the intellectual has the same sad right as anyone else to be a type . . . but the intellect doesn't. There's a pervasive smell of our graduate schools, a smell that even age cannot wither. These schools, regardless of departmental label, are all business schools. The jive talk starts there; the thought-stalls are set up. Eloquence and braininess congeal to method, and excellence is separated off from the lifelike. The life of the mind without a tree anywhere in it.

Many writers are involved in the intellectualizing scene, in part because some are notable thinkers, and in part because most know that reputations are run by Club Crit, and they are well advised to join. This is exactly where I get off and Simon thinks he wants to get on. Am I holier than he is? Sure. Almost anybody is holier than a writer. The point is, I'm smarter. I've got a better hold on living. That is, if it's peace you're after, with trees and water and silence.

The first night back home somebody entered my car and burgled it while I slept fifteen feet away. Peaceably. Silently. —*Kenneth Lash*

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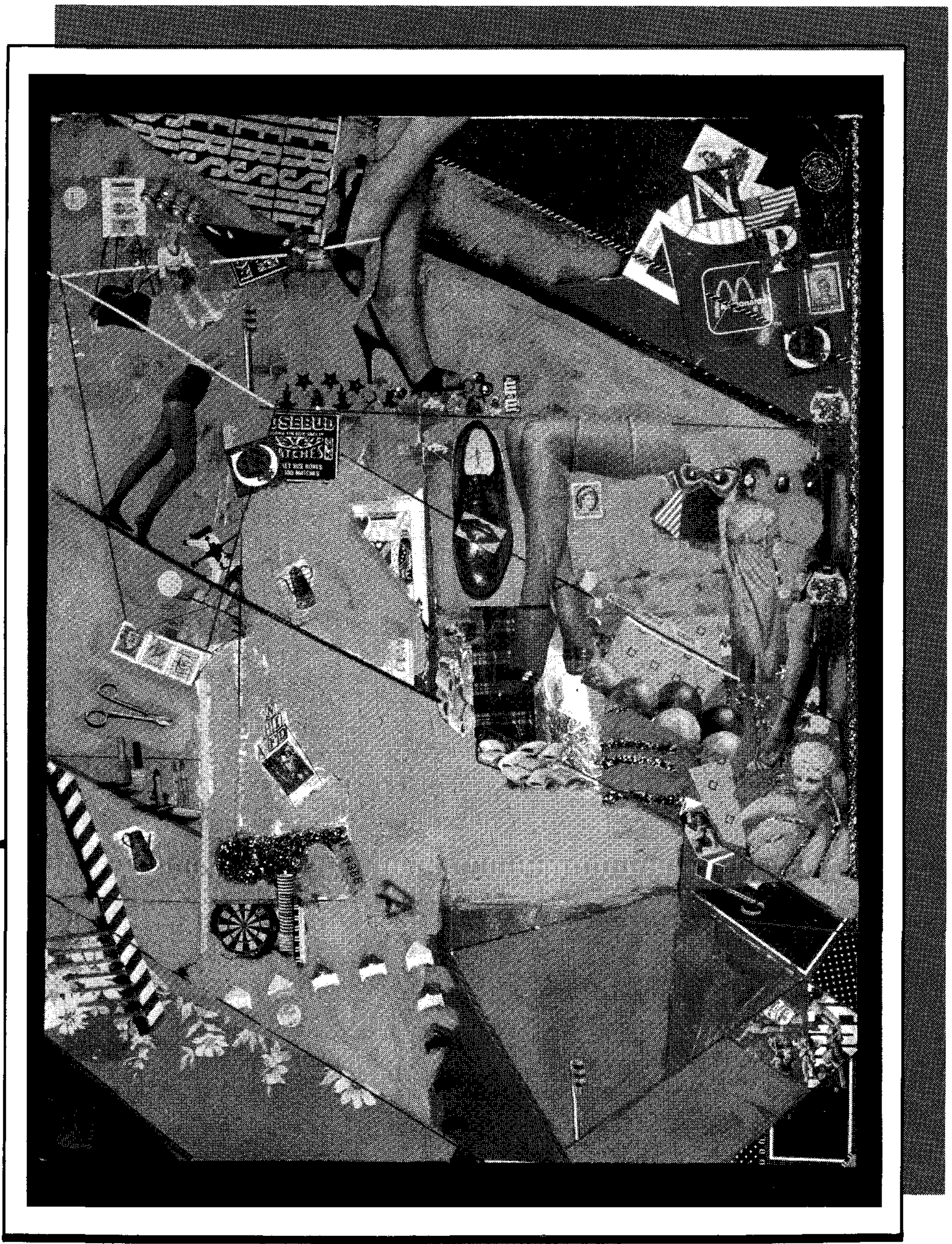
GLORIA L. KIRCHHEIMER

A CASE OF DEMENTIA



My father, who is not given to introspection except about his pension plan, came to believe that my mother was having a breakdown.

How did he reach this conclusion? His prior experiences with breakdowns were mechanically or municipally-related: toasters, subways, the work-ethic of civil servants. Within his category of mental aberrations, disrespect for one's parents or husband ranked high. Anyone who sought help from a psychiatrist had to be crazy.

He whispered over the telephone and I had to strain to hear. Mother had been "hysterical." She had called him names: "tyrant," "dictator," "monster."

In a household where contrariness on the part of its females was regarded as a sign of grippe (the culprit was offered a glass of water and made to lie down), outright criticism was unthinkable. I feared for my father's sanity; Mother was on the road to health. With delight I pictured the scene. Mother brandishing a pot in which she had cooked thousands of delicacies for him, or waving a slipper or—most appalling—rending her clothes after the fashion of her countrywomen.

Mother was born in Egypt, a polyglot like all Sephardim of her generation. She often told me stories about the bazaar, the Arab quarter, the harems, the Arabic girls who taught her to put *kohl* in her eyes and henna in her hair and amulets around her neck. She swore to me that she had given up her Egyptian ways the moment she touched Ellis Island. But I wondered. Her eyes were so large, so dark. She could play the tambourine and gyrate demurely in a rudimentary belly dance.

And now, forty years of submission to my father had finally erupted, accelerated by his retirement. A man who had commanded a large staff on three continents was now reduced to questioning my mother on the wisdom of refrigerating a grapefruit and interrogating her about every telephone call she made or received. To a man who had championed raises for his staff (but not coffee breaks), the sight of Mother leaving him in the middle of the day to attend a meeting of the charitable organization of which she was president constituted dereliction of duty.

I asked if I might speak to her. I wanted to congratulate her. For her benefit he said heartily, "Everything is fine, fine." Then again in a whisper, "Don't say anything." Then, "Honey, it's your beloved daughter," a curiously archaic mode of referring to me.

"Leave me alone." I heard Mother's voice in the background. "Leave me in peace."

"Everything is under control," my father said loudly. Then, "*Ne dis rien,*" as though with her reason, she had also lost one of her mother tongues.

To me Mother said, "Is this a life?"

Ignoring the question, I said that it was all to the good that she had finally exploded.

"I'm sick. It was terrible."

"Yes, but—"

"I was tearing my hair," she added as if to convince me of her dementia. She had in fact said to me recently and quite cheerfully that I must not be surprised if she should go berserk. "Berserk," she had repeated, relishing this exotic word which she knew only from newspaper accounts about seemingly normal persons like herself. "This is Alcatraz," she said, perhaps confusing the George Washington Bridge, which she could see from her window, with the Golden Gate. Earlier she had prepared a six-course meal for my father, with instructions, before leaving for a meeting. He had accused her of abandoning him and threatened to go on his own to the old-age home. "I prepare everything for him. Hand and foot . . . Is this the thanks? No, I don't want coffee now—" He must have made her some, a peace offering. "Half a cup then. Hmm. Not bad. How are you?" she asked me. "You're lucky. You can come and go as you please. Women's lib."

"Women's lib," Father echoed gaily over the extension phone. "Didn't I just make her a cup of coffee?"

"For better, for worse, and this is worse," he complained when next I phoned. "Of course I didn't say anything, I didn't want to upset her. Monday a meeting, Tuesday a benefit, Wednesday a luncheon—"

What energy, I thought, picturing Mother in her rakish felt hat, those great dark eyes, the snappy leather briefcase.

"What would public opinion say? A wife who leaves home every day." Public opinion, alias my father's brother for whom he had the requisite family feeling but mostly contempt. "I ask you, is this natural? She is so high-strung. What should I do?" And lest I think he was actually consulting me, he said, "I will speak to the rabbi."

Ah, not that. An unctuous, platitudinous man whose yeshiva was Madison Avenue. But so great was my father's reverence for "the office" that it did not matter what kind of person filled it as long as he displayed the appurtenances. I pictured Claude Rains, *The Invisible Man,* playing the part, skull cap bobbing merrily, prayer shawl sweeping the furniture. Respect for the office was what mattered to my father. Thus when ex-President Nixon was forced to resign, my father felt sorry for him. After all, he was The President. The only office exempt from respect was that of Labor Leader, for to my father it was synonymous with Racketeer, his memory still fresh from the unionization of his clerical staff. This rabbi had already proven himself as a keen judge of the human heart by recommending a Caribbean cruise to an insurance agent whose wife's derangement was clearly manifested in her refusal to prepare a box lunch for him every day.

How was mental illness treated in the old country, in Turkey, Greece, Egypt? The afflicted person was said to have had the evil eye cast upon him or her. By having a special incantation performed, the person lost the hex and was cured. The incantation, in Hebrew and Ladino, was first a recitation of all the victim's maternal forbears, followed by a heavily symbolic story about the prophet Eliahu. The person administering the spell must always be a female. It must be learned not through instruction but through eavesdropping while it is being performed. If the woman reciting it begins to yawn uncontrollably, the spell is working. During my childhood it had been performed with great efficacy by my mother as an all-purpose cure, equally good for melancholia and viral infections, though over the years it had gradually been replaced by penicillin.

One day I discovered, tucked into the drawer where I kept my tennis socks, a gaudy glass bead which I recognized as the charm against the evil eye. It was crudely painted with concentric circles, in the middle of which was a blue dot, presumably the iris, rimmed in (bloodshot) red, the whole resembling a bulging eye suffering from glaucoma. Designed to outstare the evil eye, it had been hidden there for my protection by my mother.

To my father's great relief, the rabbi renders the verdict that my mother is suffering from overwork and needs to curtail her activities outside the home. "Psychiatry, shmuckiatry," my father says. "A racket. They make money so families can split up. Look at the divorce rate."

I look and wonder how my parents have stayed together for so long. Was she ever truly happy? Was he ever different? Always the despot, benevolent but always contemptuous of any ambition she might have entertained (though he boasted of her capabilities behind her back). A woman who might have gone to college or held an important position. Now she administers thousands of dollars, supervises dozens of volunteers, a woman who writes and edits reports, deals with printers, rabbis, caterers, immigrants, and bureaucrats. Why has it taken her so long to revolt?

"Everything is under control," he says suddenly, signaling my mother's arrival home. "How's the weather there?" as though I were in Palm Beach instead of three miles downtown. "Darling, I was just saying that your daughter is almost as pretty as you." He laughs that nasty laugh I have heard so often.

"This is not a life," she says to me, answering her own question of an earlier conversation. "You know your mother is nothing but a vegetable? Come for dinner or I won't be responsible . . ."

No help for it. I leave my office early and rush uptown to pay my call on the unhinged woman.

A barefoot woman opens the door and greets me by singing a song in Italian. Not, Hello, glad to see you, but instead a song about a sprig of violets plucked from a mountainside, sung in a strained alto—she has never reconciled herself to being a soprano manquée. She is braless and disheveled, her slip hangs down over a crooked hem. She sashays across the room, ending her song, and with scarcely a breath recites a long poem in French about a noble wolf. On the table there is food for ten though we are only three tonight. One never knows who will drop in and truth to say, in the old days people were always dropping in and staying. "Is this my daughter?" she asks after ending her poem, upon which my father gives me a meaningful look.

A loud street noise startles us and Mother quickly licks her index finger and touches her throat three times, uttering a few expletives in Arabic.

"Isn't she cute," Father says to me with an agonized smile.

Mother points to him. "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."

I am very relieved. There is nothing untoward in her behavior. She is quite herself. "How like yourself you are," I say, quoting Strindberg to her.

"I knew you would understand." Tucking her arm under mine she says, "Only what is written in French is poetry, and only what is sung in Italian is music. The rest is holy—the Hebrew, or harsh—the German." Her cultural cosmos has no room for the Scandinavians.

"Strindberg was a Swede, Mom."

"Smorgasbord," she says, leading me to the kitchen.

"When do we eat?" Father taps on a glass with a fork. "Let's have a little service around here."

"Do you know that he can't even boil water?" Mother asks.

"What good is boiled water?" he says.

"*A boire, à boire, par pitié!*" she cries. A drink, a drink, for pity's sake. Father pours some wine. And not to be outdone, recites a short poem in French about a shipwreck. The dinner ends with conviviality. They appear to be making eyes at each other and I leave soon after dinner, not wishing to be *de trop*.

Distraught, my father has violated the hallowed custom of the parent waiting for the child to call and phones me to say that in his time women were stoned for desertion.

"Desertion? You mean adultery."

She phoned him from the *street* and refused to say where she was.

We must call the police. This is alarming.

"All she said was she had a ticket."

"A ticket? Train, bus, plane—?"

"A matinee. I ask you, is this right? Without consultation?"

"Without permission you mean," I say, emboldened.

"Of course I would have given my permission. I am a reasonable man. I don't know what to do any more."

"Perhaps—" Dare I say it? "—it would be good for *you* [emphasis mine] to talk to a psychiatrist."

"God forbid. Charlatans. They are worse than chiropractors. They are all in cahoots. No. I have an idea. You are going to laugh at it." He hesitates while I clear my throat. "My father, may he rest in peace, would turn over in his grave if he were alive. But I am a desperate man."

Not a Cabibbean cruise.

Not garlic hung around the neck.

Not a walnut shell inscribed with Hebrew characters, to be placed under a pillow.

His solution is that I, the daughter, must perform the evil eye exorcism upon my mother. Ah, no—this is the twentieth century. I remember myself as a scoffing, irreverent child, sick with stomach aches, chicken pox, strep throat; giggling as my mother performed it at my bedside, tolerant and loving even as I mimicked her yawning.

"Really, Dad—"

"It worked for you, didn't it? You got rid of the measles. And when I had pleurisy—"

Yes, this is our answer to the Ashkenazim. The evil eye incantation in lieu of chicken soup. "But I don't know it. I never memorized it."

"If you are not willing to help your own mother—"

"All right, but it's absurd. In this day and age." My bravado masks the strain of superstition which prevents me from ever breaking a chain letter (*the last person who broke this chain suffered a cerebral hemorrhage*). Why take a chance?

One late afternoon, a stylish woman in her mid-thirties, dressed in a suit and carrying an attaché case hurries to—a board meeting? A conference? A senate subcommittee hearing or a lecture hall to address a gathering?

This woman is going to cast a hex over the evil eye. Not in a village hovel or a stucco house with no plumbing, overlooking the Mediterranean, but a high-rise, 35-story apartment house with the thin walls, plastic palms and peeling paint that are *de rigueur* in new buildings. Closed-circuit television reveals to the doorman a professional woman of the new breed, the kind who understand corporate law and make decisions affecting his life. The woman's lips are moving. She is babbling a spell whose origins are lost in twelfth-century Spain.

The victim opens the door cheerfully. How to reconcile polyester with exorcism? Is there a connection? Mother shrugs. "If it will make him happy . . . I threw him out. We can't have a man listening. What a lovely evening. What a shame to stay home. I would rather go to Lord and Taylor. You need a new raincoat. Why do you wear such dark colors?" She fingers my suit. I am reminded of my father's "You are almost as pretty as your mother."

"Now Mom, you know I think this is ridiculous. All this ancient mumbo-jumbo."

This unleashes a monologue in French by Racine, about honoring one's ancestors, all while she plies me with food.

"And besides," she finishes, "it always worked when *I* did it."

I pick up the gauntlet and stamp around. "Well I suppose it can't hurt."

We lower the blinds and take the telephone off the hook. I feel as though I am about to perform the Black Mass. Mother lies down on her bed. The Arts and Leisure section from last Sunday's *Times* is on her night table, along with a dog-eared copy of proverbs by La Rochefoucauld.

"Salt," she prompts me.

I go into the kitchen and pour about half a teaspoonful into my right hand.

Mother's eyes are closed. Will something dreadful happen if I don't do it right? *The last person who broke the chain died a horrible death.*

"Take your time, honey," she says. "I'm very comfortable."

I raise my right hand and make a pass over her face. I begin to recite in Ladino, with my American accent: "*Vida, daughter of Allegra, whose mother was Miriam . . .*" I feel a lump in my throat. I am blessing my mother. "*Before her was Fortuna who was the fruit of Esther . . .*" A veritable Amazon land from which men are excluded. Women's lib, I hear my father say. Mother sighs. Words come into my head, Hebrew blessings learned as an unwilling Sunday School student. I am swaying now as I chant. Twenty floors below us, trucks rattle down the avenue, a few bars of disco music float up and die away.

There is a smile on Mother's face, her eyes remain closed. Now again in Ladino: "*Eliahu walked down the road, clad in iron, shod in iron. Three keys he carried: one to open the gate, one to lock it, and one to ward off the evil eye.*" I smother a yawn and repeat the line about the three keys. I see him clanking down a country road, dusty trees—poplars, cypresses—the prophet in medieval garb, fooling the authorities, fooling the evil eye, casting away doubt and evil from the people of Israel. "*How many are the daughters, how many are the names, how many the signs and wonders?*" I am so tired. I can hardly raise the hand holding the salt over Mother's face. Wearily, yawning, I trace a six-pointed star across her face, a name for each point of the star, a blessing for each name, miracles for each succeeding generation, a logarithmic explosion of miracles for my mother.

She opens her eyes and nods kindly at me, at my hand. I open it, press the index finger of my left hand to the salt so that some grains adhere to it. She sits up and I place my finger gently in her mouth, applying the salt to her palate. I do this three times, reciting a threefold blessing in Hebrew which I do not remember ever having heard before. My eyes are tearing. Violently I throw the salt over her left shoulder. I am yawning uncontrollably. Mother reaches out and embraces me.

"How do you feel?" I ask, not knowing what to do with the rest of the salt on my palm.

"Wonderful," she says. "For once your father was right. I never felt better in my life." □

JOHN MORGAN

CABIN ON THE YUKON

A tiny black square on the map
with greenhouse tomatoes growing
among the weeds, and children's
drawings tacked to every wall.
My friend and I sacked
out and held each other
close in the partial dark.

Dozing, I remembered that for years
there'd hung above my bed
a delicate brown wash in sun
and shade: Bacchus and Pan, a small
girl's dream of summer. Bouncing
and bouncing till the springs
complained, I played among them,
rising and falling, my gusty self
awash in wind and rain.

Ghosts, and the promise of a sea
long since departed, relics
in the mirror as I speed away.

And then I slept and dreamt the world
had come and gone,
and came to where Pan's candied
pipes were playing. There,
a little girl in pigtails, rising,
falling under his sweet spell
until she tumbled in a heap,
dropping on soft pillows into sleep.

How do I know the abandoned house
is me, the breeze within the dream
carrying ash, the clash of a screen
door shutting? Spooked out of
the settling cabin, I remember running
back to the river, back to our canoe,
a vacant swing still swinging,
loose voices singing in the storm.

ELEANOR LERMAN

TAKING PICTURES

for Allen Boretz

Somewhere there is a photograph of the many things
    I want to tell you
or many photographs, all of a summer day in 1922. . . .

And yes, yes, I have received all of your "thoughtful" messages
I am aware of your advice: You think it would be best for me
    to spend my time
among pet animals and little children, murmuring endearments
    waving from a distance
doing nothing to upset the careful balance that had been struck
    between then and now
that being the point at which I should have stopped, exhausted,
    to lean against the wall of all those years

But I am not yet in need of your fatal ministrations
    the kindly word, the comforting hand,
for somewhere there is a photograph of how I once escaped you
    on a summer day in 1922. . . .

And yes, yes, I know how you will greet me
With the cold kiss of the lover to whom love
    is an affliction
you will offer tea and medicine, mention the pallor
    of my cheek
and draw me into your vast house where every bed
is occupied by a weeping angel. These are the ways
    you mean to show me
how dangerous it would be to upset the careful balance
    that has been struck between dawn and darkness
that being the point at which I should have stopped, exhausted,
    to kneel before the mystery you say no one can solve

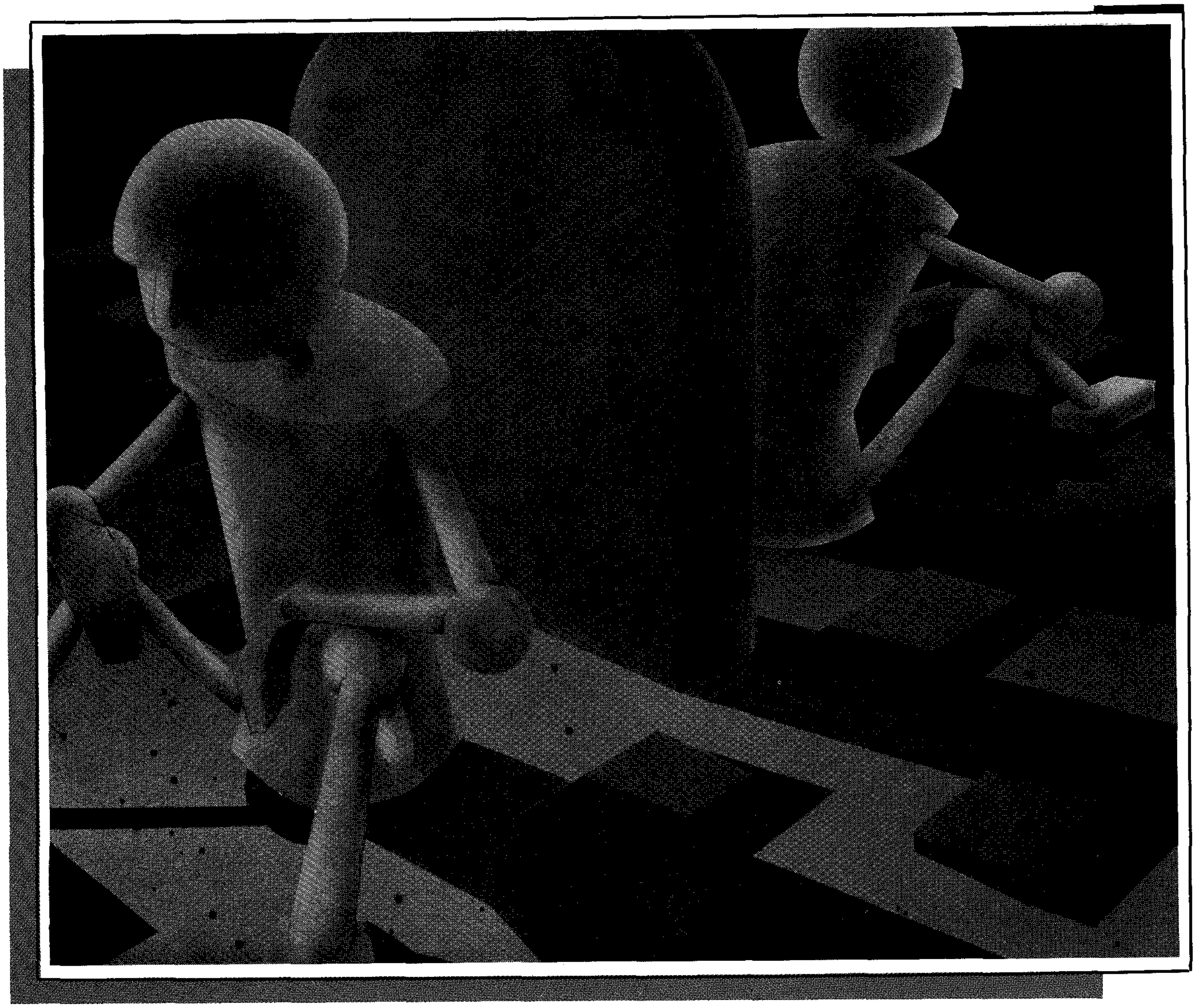
But I am not ready to believe it must be solved, and thereby ended
    so I am traveling, traveling,
searching the world for the photograph of how I will escape you
    on a summer day in 1922. . . .

For in that picture I am walking down a street through
    August twilight
when I see the woman who will be the love of my life
    washing her hair by an open window
I rush into the apartment and carry her off
    wrapped in a damp kimono
O let her parents moan
In a month they will be dancing at our wedding

And it will all begin again: the life, the mystery
the angels rising from their sickbeds to celebrate my joy

GRIEVE NOW

CINDA REDFIELD



There is a cemetery I run by, on weekends when I have the time and the impetus to do six miles. I am not a serious runner; I have developed some endurance but no speed, so it's a sort of dog-trot I fall into as I circuit the brightened neighborhoods around the charred and trash-ridden core of downtown housing. At this pace one has time to observe the workings of the season, and to think. To shovel over the clots and weight of my relationship with Albert: after three years one calls it a *relationship,* not an *affair.* I don't think Albert and I had an affair even at the beginning, for doesn't that mean candlelight and suggestive conversation, the erratic signaling of blood and a thrill up the jellyfish stuff of the spine, darkening the brain? And the brain groping like a homeowner in a blackout. Albert and I slept together the second—no, the third—time we met. Nothing fanciful; no flirtation, and our brains (mine, I'm sure his) with their metaphorical thumbs on the light switch the whole time.

The cemetery is rather large but otherwise not unusual, dating back to the town's first flush of population from river traffic—or, to be more exact, the slaughter and packing of meat to be loaded into stout barrels and barged downriver. There are a couple of modest stone crypts, the faces of their angelic sentinels stripped by weather of all but the most reserved expressions. The crypts postdate the earliest headstones by fifty or sixty years; they bespeak railroad and bank money, from when the now tieless and sunken rails were first laid shining along the river, and the meat carcasses hung shoulder to shoulder among huge blocks of ice in the shunted wooden cars. Track is all over this town, about a third of it still in use. The abandoned rails cause a great deal of complaint, especially at the unrepaired crossings which viciously jolt the undercarriage of any car that fails to brake and climb them one axle at a time. There is dispute over who is responsible for covering the abandoned track, as if it belonged to an anonymous past that no one inherited.

I consider the cemetery mine; no one is ever there and the high iron gates are kept padlocked against vandalism. Not that the dead are in any wise present for me, nor are any of them my dead. But the names that can be read through the iron fence speak of German and English stock of the kind I come from: industrious, patchily literate, religious (one can assume all three from their having lain down in this well-kept ground). Prides, Schwartzes, Knowells. The stones report the names and parenthetical dates. I suppose it is a romantic simplification, but I see these lives as straightforward: people who loved or didn't, married, bore children, died. Lives stripped of extraneous uncertainties and boredoms. Three children's stones in a row with the same final date, 1891. Was it diphtheria? A fire? For none of the stones carry any description of situation, and few afforded the engraving of any sentiment—which is why the broad stone to the left of August Pride's caught my attention, with its deeply lettered admonition: GRIEVE NOW. I wondered who had been so lax they had to be enjoined to grieve, through stone, from the deep and grudgeless consideration of eternity. I could not believe it was just a piece of willed nastiness. Although neither Albert nor I are church-goers, we hold onto vestigial notions of an after-life. Mine is a consciousness relieved of want, fear, and the limited apparatus of the senses; finally knowing, once out of the maze, which way one ought to have turned. Albert is a philosopher: his after-life is an outgrowth of—rather than an answer to—life's puzzling. Mine, he says, is the moral equivalent of a surprise party.

When I met him, Albert was pursuing Kierkegaard with a single-hearted purity. I had finished my undergraduate degree but had taken a high school teaching position in the same town. Inertia held me: there was no particular invitation elsewhere, and I liked settling into the town, growing familiar with the faces of buildings, knowing the girl at the supermarket check-out. I would have been happier in that past where people were tied to a place for all their lives, for better or worse. People and places define one, over the years, if only by limiting possibilities. These days one can move anywhere, be anything; no one is going to inquire closely into my life unless I invite him to. Perhaps I invited Albert, but that was later, after we moved here. Back in the university town where we slept together two or three times a week, there was always a coolness applied to the heat, anesthetizing, like sunburn spray. I thought I was being both sensible and sophisticated.

It was a crisis for Albert when someone—it wouldn't have been a professor—drummed into his head the statistics on 3% employment of PhD's in Philosophy. If Albert truly belonged anywhere, it was in the realm of pure and powerful academics, Oxford or Heidelberg in their prime. But America does not export philosophers, he said. A bitter little attempt at a joke. I plied him with coffee and zucchini bread; he stayed at my apartment two days and nights while he agonized. When he took the job at a small community college in Iowa, I helped him move.

He called several times. At the end of the summer he called and told me he'd heard about a social studies position at a local high school. And so my books, tv, and cat moved into the high-ceilinged apartment alongside his books, stereo, and kitchen utensils. For Albert is a cook; it is something he took up as an undergraduate, and has become the single part of his life where an idea can be conceived and perfectly executed from beginning to end. I emphasize that perfection: I *can* cook, Albert *is* a cook, and has made me understand the difference.

Albert has been unhappy since we moved here, unhappy off and on for over a year. Maybe he was unhappy before, but I didn't know him then. Maybe a man of his disposition, so stolid and meticulous and ambitious, is destined to be unhappy in our time. The college gave him another section of Introductory Philosophy last semester: a course he claims does more harm than good. The syllabus touches on Plato, St. Augustine, Hume, Nietzsche: giving the students the illusion they know what these formidable minds were about. And Albert is compelled to do a mock march step across sacred ground. "Philosophy is a *system*," Albert declares, chopping ginger root with violent strokes. He drops the ginger into the sizzling sesame oil. His wok is the closest thing Albert has to my cat, much loved and handled. "A little learning is a dangerous thing," he says, leveling the wooden spoon at my breast. "Look at you—" Very well, I think, look at me. But it is not comfortable to have my dilettantism pointed up as often as Albert does it. I find myself making lists in my mind of all the things I've tried and dropped: the piano, the watercolors, the studies in literature and history.

Well, Albert. When one's lived with a man for a year, does one see him? One gets used to him, one gets used to anybody. But I have a clear picture of him as he stands by the stove: spoon returned to its task and face carried upward, with its load of argument and purity, ready for the stake. Something about his face is beautiful at moments like this—perhaps what attracted me to him? Because he is not handsome, or sexy in any regular way: a loose-skinned, unmuscled man. Who is about to make a joke in the kitchen about the oration of Pericles and put his arm around me, kiss me, in the pungent upwaft of ginger. The root of love, some say.

Sometimes I feel the need for an occasion, something to celebrate. Albert will obligingly drive to the liquor store and we buy champagne, stopping off at the fanciest supermarket for Camembert and crackers. We did not make note of any certain points in our relationship and so there are no proper anniversaries, though sometimes an event is alluded to: "Wasn't it about this time last year you moved in—or no, it was the end of the month—" We go to our separate families for holidays, and neither of us loved childhood enough to be fond of birthdays. And yet we are a small society, we two: like the tribes of Polynesia, we need our ceremonies. I resort to Margaret Mead to justify something simply felt—at least by me. Albert tries, but there is no internal logic to the occasion. I put a record on the stereo and we dance, Albert with his weight too far forward, his hand too low on my back. How can I follow your lead, I ask, when I can't feel it?

Neither of us really knows how to dance, anyway: we grew up in a time when partners danced opposing, untouching: performing for each other a small sexual pantomime. So we return to the table, clink glasses, and talk. And sometimes it is all right—it becomes like any other evening when we have put the papers to be graded aside and the television is off. But sometimes the expectation I have built up—putting on a silk shirt and eyeshadow, watching the silvery percolations in the champagne glasses and that pale, abstracted face over the candles—sometimes the whole structure of the evening will collapse too suddenly. And I will say something. "Maybe you should go to Copenhagen, Albert. Get a job as janitor or curator. They've kept the house intact, haven't they? You could handle his books; why, you could sneak in some night and sleep in his bed—"

Then I take the champagne bottle (Albert doesn't much like champagne, anyway) and retreat to the back porch. One leg straddling the porch rail, I fill my glass. Isn't it wonderful, I think, how we can still surprise ourselves? Because I never thought I'd say such a stupid thing, and yet there it was—that or something like it. I think about the organ that does not show up on x-rays. The one we are always outgrowing. People misplace its function: they think it is the heart that aches with malice or triumph. But the heart pumps blood, plain blood. As a runner I have trained it. The heart is a muscle.

This other organ is small, pellucid; out of sight even of x-rays, it lies against otherwise involuntary muscles and gestates hope. This is the seat of first love, swollenly pressed against heart and stomach, interfering with breath and appetite, and it occasionally trickles some of the old secretion into my bloodstream. So I straddle the porch rail and I remember how it was to be nineteen, to have a brain so saturated with the stuff of love that it made me dizzy, like riding up and up in an elevator filled with perfumes. Which is not at all the way it is now that I am twenty-five, and with Albert. The organ in question atrophies and poisons as one grows older. It is a wonder that, unlike the appendix, it does not poison in a way so physically obnoxious that it has to be located, finally, and removed.

I pour the last champagne into my glass and put the bottle next to the screen door. I am now more than a little drunk. I can see Albert through the dining room window. Bowed from the waist with an old-fashioned grace, he does reverence to the stereo for what it is, its power to give pleasure, at the same time that he is manipulating it. Classical music from the University station crawls out like a cat onto the window ledge, to be met by the cotton-soft air of a city in spring. A truck nearby down-shifts, hogs squeal, and the moon shows a pocked and veiled face over the apartment garages. The cat must go out, I think. The bottle next to the door will remind me to let her out. Have I done something wrong, did I turn my back on some vital opening with Albert, or another man? Because surely life, being so wide and prolific, would have romantic love among its possibilities? I think this and watch Albert move about the kitchen. He has found the pepper and onions and is preparing to stir-fry. But the mushrooms he will not find behind yesterday's casserole, and so I open the screen door, catch it with a foot, pick up the bottle. "Hello," I say, putting no freight on it. I pull out the mushrooms and slice them while Albert talks about Mozart. Such a frivolous career, in contrast to the wondrous precision of his music— "Maybe it's like what they say about Shakespeare's plays," Albert says. While the neighborhood boys taunt the landlady's dog until it bays, poor hound, at something and nothing. "That someone else wrote them."

The first of May falls on a Saturday. In another time it was May Day: fertility, flowers and eggs in baskets, small trees brought into the house, large trees stripped into poles and hung with ribbons. A pastoral holiday, now defunct. In a suburban neighborhood (one of the teachers I work with tells me) the children still make and exchange May baskets. But this is an isolated observance, done because it is nice, in a neighborhood that wants to be nice. And yet it is May; on Lafayette Street a wino steps blinking into the morning light, looks at me as if about to say something, his mouth working. The architecture of sky and ground softly reknits, trees dangle their hundred small fruiting parts, and people sit on the porch steps with their legs sticking out, aggressively exposed.

I have come to feel at home in this town, in a way more truly at home than in the apartment; for the apartment means Albert, and Albert means effort and dissonance, because the effort is not sure of itself. After all, we never exactly *chose* one another. But the town is not trying, it wears, even on the first of May, an air of resignation: a guiltless disrepair of roofs and lives under the fresh sunlight.

The women in the supermarket are intent upon thir shopping, as if here lay the essential business of life. I compare bunches of fresh broccoli, meet the eye of a middle-aged Black woman who is doing the same. "It's better than last week's, isn't it? And cheaper, too—" We smile together, grateful for this small gesture of providence without having any understanding of *why* it happens that the broccoli is better and cheaper this week.

"This is what the good times are like," I tell myself, telling myself to remember. Perhaps because of the longer lease of daylight on the world, perhaps because we have spent the day apart, Albert and I now share an easy companionability. Or because we are in the kitchen and it is one of Albert's meals we are working on. He resents occasions like last night, when I was supposed to bake the chicken and didn't, forcing him to throw something together *ad hoc*. "You just never commit yourself," Albert says. He is boning the chicken and I am leaning against the counter, drinking a glass of white wine, watching the neat severance of flesh from its structure of bone. "What is important is to decide what to do, and then do it. Kierkegaard sets that all out in *Either/Or*. Did you ever read it?" "No," I say, not telling him that at the time he marked the book for me I resented the idea of changing my reading for him, as much as changing my brand of soap. "It isn't important what you decide," Albert explains. "Not even whether it comes out better or worse. Where *you* get hung up is trying to anticipate that, and it can't be done. That's where faith comes in—the Knight of

Good Faith in *Fear and Trembling*—and things get very complex. . . . But you could try *Either/Or*; it's an early work, written for laymen."

Albert's knife flashes in the long, late light through the screen door, and the flesh, the polymorphous soft stuff of life, sloughs off the strict bones. Yet it is the bones which he throws away (I don't point this out to him). It is a perfect moment and I feel myself trembling a little at it, at the beauty of the white glazed bowl into which Albert knifes the meat, leaving a trail of watery blood along the sink. At the earnestness of his face which fails to rigidify, to determine the shape of its flesh, even now. No, I think, you cannot decide your life like that, for the flesh has its mysteries and the world has its mysteries and tomorrow who knows who we will be?

Just as I was not surprised when I ran by the cemetery today to see that the gravestone beside August Pride's read GRIEVENOW, all one word in capitals: it is a person's name and not a message at all. Yet I felt as if an admonition had been lifted from the stone to print itself inside my head. If not truly to grieve, then to attend to things, to forestall grief? Or is that possible? I put my hand on Albert's arm below the rolled shirt sleeve, meaning to say something. But when he says "What?" my mind goes blank. I get the wine bottle out of the refrigerator, fill my glass and another which I hand to him. "What is it?" Albert asks, and I know I am giving him the struggling, mute look the wino gave me this morning. I hate thinking about winos when I'm drinking: it depresses me, and I feel myself frown. "What is it?" Albert asks a third time. "Nothing. Oh, nothing. Only, isn't it a lovely evening?"

When we are at parties, Albert is always on the other side of the room. This makes it difficult if I want to leave and he is occupied in conversation; also, unlike a husband, the threads of his attention are not with me. He is not ready to rescue me from an uncomfortable situation, like the attention of Bob Mayhue. Who has just brought me another scotch in one of those oddly weightless, disposable plastic glasses—awful, anonymous things that prevent me from keeping track of how much I drink. Once I put the glass down I can never remember which one is mine, where I put it. Half-empty drinks litter the bookshelves and chair arms of the room. It is a remodelled Victorian house, belonging to Albert's head of department: Afghan rug on the waxed hardwood floor, museum posters, thumb pots and crayon drawings that give evidence of children. I have somehow ended up on the couch, with Bob Mayhue beside me. For the last hour that tanned face has leaned toward my face, animating itself, displaying the distinguished and dragged-at mien, punctuating cleverness with cynicism. I know his breed. I do not have to be told that he recently attended a symposium in San Francisco, has published articles but nothing seminal, sleeps with his graduate students. Bob's field is American literature and so we have been talking about contemporary novels, which gave his cynicism free play. (Of course he is going to write a novel, already has it written, really, in his head.) Now he switches the topic to Albert, the inevitable polite prying: How long have I known him? Am I happy here?

Now, I think, now you should come over. We are both looking at Albert, the flannel-shirted stomach easing out over his belt as he inclines toward the department head. Don't breathe in his face, I think, because Albert will do that, engrossed in making a point, unaware of how close his face is pushing, of his listener's startled, offended expression. "I've only met Albert once," Bob says, "but Schultz speaks highly of him. Says he's a man of ideas. Tell me," he says, reaching to light my cigarette, "what is it like to live with a man of ideas?"

A light rain absent-mindedly taps on the windshield, and the wipers twitch and ease back. I have accepted a ride home from Bob; Albert simply nodded when I passed him. He had gotten Dr. Schultz onto the subject of curriculum development, of eight-week course sections devoted to the study of individual philosophers instead of the traditional survey approach. His pet idea, that literature and sociology students need a groundwork of philosophy, a guiding philosopher, if they are to think critically in their fields. I think Albert would extend this, if he could, to computer programming and animal science. An icon of clear thinking in every home and office, kept by the dictionary. And I hear myself saying this to Bob Mayhue, catch his amused side-long glance. Oh God, I think, too much scotch, I hate a woman who runs her man down. Bob opens the door of the Datsun, gives me a hand over the gutter, onto the grass. I am thinking of the robins that perch and squabble among the gravestones, how they must be silent now, bedraggled by rain, surviving with instinctive patience. That is the kind of patience I would like to have, to be damp-skinned and patient right now instead of relatively dry and edgy. Bob is there, tall and unnecessary, on the porch stoop, while I fish for the keys in my purse. "May I kiss you?" he asks, and I look up, nonplussed, my right hand still scrabbling. "Why?" I ask back, meaning to stall him while I find the keys. "Spoken like a true philosopher's wife," he says jauntily. And tipping my face up into the rain, he kisses me. This is how Albert's headlights find us, picking us out along the row of doors.

We are watching "Sixty Minutes," Albert and I; he leaves tomorrow morning. In the middle of the room boxes are piled, and along the walls are unaccustomed blank spaces where his stereo and books were. Yesterday I helped him sort through books, his and mine having grown intermingled on the shelves. At one point I had to excuse myself; I went up to the bathroom and cried for a few minutes, then repaired the damage and came back down. I hate women who use their tears. It was when Albert hoisted a Riverside edition of the complete works, asking, "Is this your Shakespeare, or mine?" A funny question, now that I think about it. When I came down Albert was talking, as if he had not really noticed I was gone. "Look at you," he was saying. "You fail to examine yourself, even about the smallest things. Of course I believe it if you say he just kissed you. But you must have given him some opening—" And I thought about the conversation in the car.

"You are conscious but you don't stand apart from yourself—you don't reflect." Albert firmly wiped each book with a cloth before putting it in the box. I pointedly handed him Flaubert and Zola, from a shelf we were not working on. He looked up at me sharply. "That's fiction, not life. Human freedom is *real*, but it requires commitment before you act. Without that you're little different from your cat, for example." I did not find this a demeaning comparison, but Albert was never an animal lover. He opened *Madame Bovary* to the fly-leaf. "This was given to me by my first girlfriend," Albert said.

"You don't see any message in that?" I grow brave, if blundering, when I'm confused. It wasn't clear whether Albert asks me. He is fishing for neutral conversation. much beer that Friday and argued with Schultz; he had said how Schultz's ilk (I could just see him snarling out that "ilk" three inches from the man's face)—how modern liberals were no better than Hegel, cutting their beliefs down to fit their convenience. That's vintage Albert, insulting people by comparing them with Hegel. I wondered if Schultz was well-read enough to catch the part about Hegel or if he just digested the tail of the remark. And then the moment in the headlights. If Albert was leaving me, was it because I kissed Bob Mayhue or because I have failed to reach some stage of philosophical development?

The "Sixty Minutes" segment is on civil defense. "Do you think anyone would survive a nuclear war?" Albert asks me. He is fishing for neutral converstation. Pictures of bomb shelters stocked with blankets and bottled water flash on the screen; then maps of escape routes from targeted urban areas. The commentator predicts giant traffic jams. An absurd thought, but then what isn't absurd when one is faced with such a future? Even Albert is absurd, sitting on the couch drinking his Tuborg beer and paging through my cookbook, and at the same time asking such a question.

"Survive? Maybe. But for what? Do you know what they say would live through it? Not cows, not fish. Cockroaches."

"The eyes of potatoes are poisonous—did you know that?" I am making potato soup; Albert has found the recipe and turned to the reference section in the cookbook.

"Potatoes are a traditional Anglo-Irish food," I tell him. "I grew up with them, and I cut the eyes out, I always have."

"It might work for the better," Albert says, after a pause. "A few families surviving, making a new world. The slate wiped clean. The mistakes of prior generations horribly exposed." He is quoting from somewhere, but I don't know where. Then, "The soup's boiling over."

I turn the heat off and fill a bowl with soup, setting it down in front of him. I made it carefully, looking already to his memory of it, this last meal. It is probably the best thing I've cooked since we've lived here. And now, because he's made me angry, I say, "But you and I aren't going to be anyone's prior generation, are we, Albert? So it really isn't our problem, is it?"

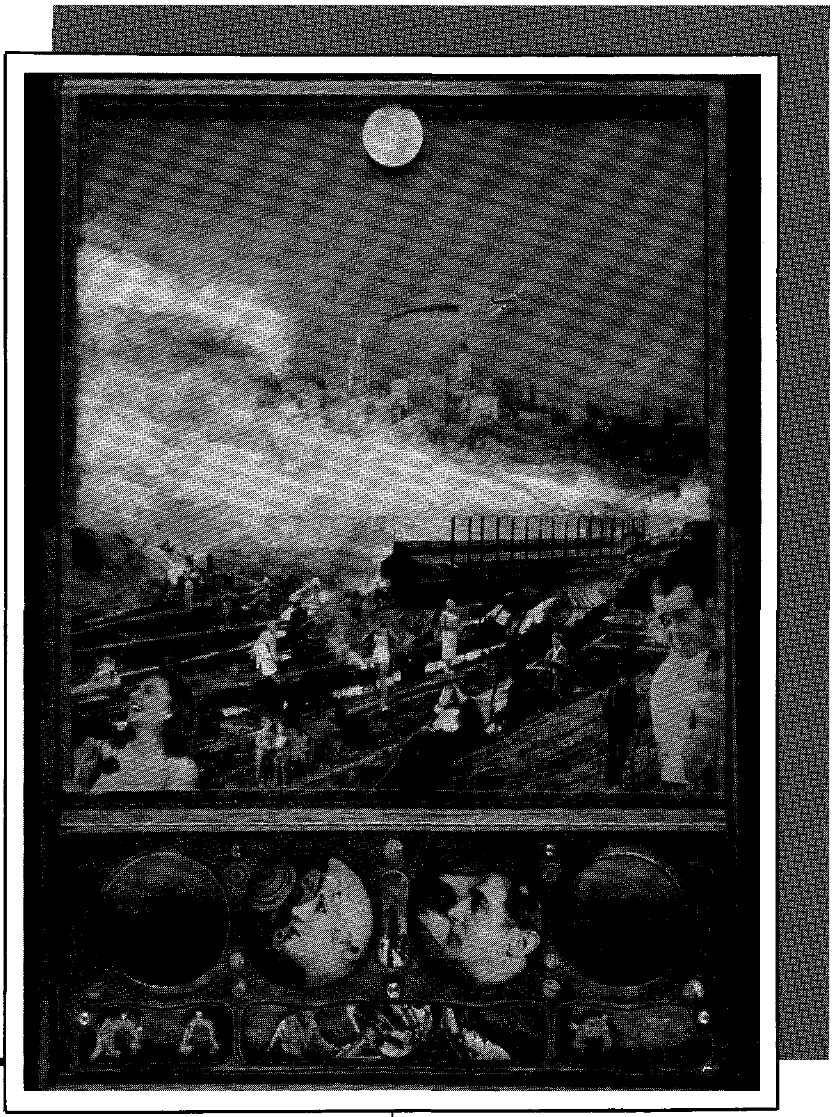
Sometimes I think Albert just forgets to be human, and it's my job to remind him, as long as we're together. ☐

RICHARD WEAVER

FATHER'S DAY

From a thousand I choose ten cards.
From ten I choose three.
Fēng   wind
fuqin   father
guāng   to be used up, nothing left.
These I cast in my mind
until each catches hold.
Father-it is Father's day.
I think to call.
I think of a house
in which neither of us lived.
I stare at the brush strokes,
each character more alien to you than me,
but look for you in them, knowing
you are not there either
just as I knew once before
that the poem I had written
about your missing leg was not you.
There are two legs in the character for father,
a whole man with children at his side,
a house above him, the sky in full sun.
But what of these other words:
wind and nothing left?
They seem like accusations
leveled at both of us.
The wind is caught in a bottomless house,
a shape not unlike that of a man,
a simple x. Can that too be us?
And guang—part fire, part explosion,
a barbed hook jutting out from below.
I rearrange the cards so that father
is followed by nothing and then wind.
I move them again, like a shell game,
this time looking away,
willing blindness to my hands.
Father, you are safely in the center now,
between nothing on the left
and the boxed wind. What can you make
of this house of wind built on nothing?
What have we made of us?

THE HONEYMOON • KATHLEEN SPIVACK



When they got to Paris he lay down and went to bed for two weeks. Eunice was stunned. Was this how she was going to see Paris: from a hotel bedroom? "Oh no!" she cried in dismay, but "You go," he offered. "I've had enough of cities."

"But this isn't a city; this is Paris!" she retorted illogically. Still, he would not be budged. So Eunice went out alone and walked through the streets of Paris that were like pictures of the streets of Paris. She walked, self-conscious, with a quick tight fear. She worried about being alone, and her French was not good.

Still, "Bonjour, Madame," the owner of the little cafe across from the hotel greeted her each morning. He smiled and pulled out her chair: one chair. "And how is Monsieur?" Monsieur was back at the hotel, lying on a bed, reading. He had had enough of dragging his body around Europe. "I'm happy here," he assured Eunice. "Go out. Enjoy yourself." For it was she who had been most adamant about this European trip. And Paris! Paris was to have been the culmination. "The Pièce de Résistance," she said to herself. But she couldn't very well force him to come out if he didn't want to, could she?

But though Paris looked exactly like a stage set of Paris, as Venice does a set for an opera about Venice, still, the actors were all wrong. They took up too much space, they walked with a long and lanky stride, they talked too loudly, in flat tones, and all carried baggage. Knapsacks, bedrolls, and suitcases: they were, in fact, Americans.

Everywhere Eunice looked she could see Americans. Americans at the Cafe Flore, Americans at the Deux Magots, in the museums, in the parks and gardens, Americans sitting on curbs. She tripped over their long and outstretched legs. "Hey, Kansas City," one boy called to her as she picked her way through the crowd, "got any spare change?" While "Want some grass?" muttered another in her ear. Eunice craned her neck and hoped she might see Sartre.

When she came home in the afternoons, Nick seemed genuinely pleased. "Tell me about it," he called from the bathtub. He was soaking in scented hot water; the steam rose around him. “Did you have fun? What did you do today?” “Oh, I went to a few museums.” Eunice did not say that she had gone, expecting to be awed, and hadn't been. “My feet hurt.” She had stood there, in front of masterpieces she might never see again, and tried to build up her emotions, hoping to conjure tears.

But truth was, she had stood, even before the Mona Lisa, and had been totally unmoved. “I wish you had been there,” she called to him. Why? He would have been even more impatient: insisting they move on. “I've decided I've had enough of museums,” he called back over the steam. He splashed cheerfully. “This whole city is a museum!” she cried reproachfully. “I know,” he said, “but I'm ready to go home.”

“We can't go home yet,” she said, alarmed.” Our flight doesn't leave for another six days.” She felt guilty; it was she who had planned the trip. “And we can't give up our charter tickets.” “No,” he agreed, not seeming too bothered. “I can wait. Just don't expect anything very much from me these next few days.”

Eunice was disturbed. She didn't understand him. His insistence on staying behind was like a weight, dragging on her. She could not shake off her inertia, her feeling that she should be staying with him. But once in Paris, she was determined to see all of it. She cast one longing look at Nick on the bed, the pile of bright books lying around him, and went out again. “Ah.” He settled happily into a book: free for a few hours.

On the way back to the hotel one midday, Eunice stopped to buy some bread, and then she bought some cheese. She took it into bed with Nick, and it was the best bread both had ever eaten. The next day she bought some wild strawberries, in a little basket of leaves. They lay on the bed, eating strawberries, and looked out at the sky.

“Why don't you call your friend Cynthia?” Nick suggested. Their time in Paris was running out. Eunice was disturbed; she had deliberately chosen not to look up her college roommate, now living in Paris. Eunice wanted to preserve Nick, her discovery, for herself. But, at Nick's suggestion, she phoned Cynthia anyway.

The two women had not seen each other since college, where they had had a mysterious and unspoken falling out, a drawing away, mutually, from each other. They had been French majors, both, and Cynthia had actually come to Paris, right after graduation. Eunice could not explain the lightness she felt, when Cynthia left the country. But now she was delighted to see her old friend. “Eunice!” Cynthia squealed in delight, and even her American voice sounded French. Cynthia's conversation was now accented, with little shrugs and moues. “After all,” as she explained to the couple, all in the hotel room, huddled on the bed, “Paris is impossible, yes?” “And I should know,” she added, and for a moment her voice was pure Missouri.

Cynthia worked, as a bi-lingual secretary, for rich American firms that had branches in Paris. She went from one to another. “It is amusing,” she said, “and it lets me live.” Cynthia had come to Paris, Eunice remembered, on some vague romantic errand. “A friend,” Cynthia had said, understating. “I must stay in Paris.” “Male or female?” Nick quipped. Cynthia silenced him with a look.

In truth, Cynthia had a number of “friends,” but in Paris everything is possible. Although she was charming, attractive, and “with it,” not one of the friends who professed such interest in her had ever invited her to their homes, she told the couple. Some were married, some lived with their parents still, some had houses in the country. But to not one of these homes had Cynthia ever been. “The French are very closed,” was all she would say. “They are conservative.”

Of her latest friend she said, “We are living together.” But still, he did not take her home to meet his parents; they would never approve. “Have lunch with me,” she said to Eunice and Nick, “I know a place.” And Nick got up and got ready; they went out.

Afterwards Nick went back to the hotel. Eunice and Cynthia stayed on together. They strolled through the streets, stopping here and there. Eunice felt totally relaxed, now that someone was with her. She was breathless with happiness, seeing her former friend: somehow Cynthia now represented, in a paradoxical and absurd way, the essence of Paris to her. They rode up the Seine. “Oh, it's so much fun to do something touristy!” cried Cynthia. She had been too busy in Paris. “If only you had called me before.”

It was Eunice's last day in Paris. That evening, Nick comfortably ensconced in his room, Cynthia took Eunice to a restaurant along with some French friends. Eunice let Cynthia order for her. She basked happily in a language she only half understood.

Before they left the restaurant, the two women went to the ladies' room. Cynthia's friends waited for them outside. Cynthia went in first, and came out saying nothing. When Eunice went in, she found the bathroom lined with mirrors: on the floor under the toilet and bidet; the whole of the walls, and the ceiling. Eunice watched herself peeing, her hairy mouth. She did not know what to make of it. “Did you see?” Cynthia asked her when she came out. Eunice nodded, embarassed.

Then Cynthia took her hand and led Eunice into the ladies' room again. She motioned to Eunice to undress, and slipped out of her clothes herself: she held Eunice's hand throughout. The two women took off their panties and spread their legs, solemnly regarding their sex, reflected in the floor that was a mirror. Cynthia gently clasped the sex of Eunice and, as they both watched in the mirror below, inserted one finger. Cynthia gazed steadily into Eunice's eyes; Eunice's eyes glazed over.

As they walked back together late at night to the hotel, and Nick, the noises of the Americans seemed especially loud. Eunice walked, conscious of moisture between her legs. She held her friend's hand: she was in Paris. Soon, the voices of the Americans stopped.

“Well, did you have a good time?” Nick asked, when she got back to the room. He had been waiting up for her. Eunice stood by the window, drowsy and intoxicated. “Yes,” she could hardly answer. “I can't wait to leave Paris,” he said. He put his arm around her and led her to the bed. “I'll be so glad to get home tomorrow,” he said, stroking her, “Won't you?” □

JENIFER LEPIANO

IRON BEARD LEAVES HOME

The first time Timothy Harris and I skipped Developmental Drama he bought me a donut at Maybee's.

"The course," he said, when we had carried our tea and crullers to the table, "is a fundamental attack on our individuality."

I was rather enjoying the first week of classes. I only skipped that day because you have to take a break from everything once in a while. Tim was different. He refused to join the daily exercises and when Mr. Edwards insisted he play Dragon Gold like everybody else, he turned pale and asked to go to the nurse's office.

"I suppose it does get a bit weird sometimes," I said.

Timothy explained that he had an intuitive distrust of Edwards. "The games he makes us play are masked attempts to submerge us in the group will."

I draped my serviette over my face but Timothy kept talking. "My father says only individuals can create the New Society."

"What does your father do?" I asked. Mine was in construction and never mentioned a new society except to say that this was it.

"He's an ideas man," said Timothy. "Do you want more tea?"

September rambled on and skipping Drama got to be a bit of a habit. I was making a study of Timothy. Everything about him was different. To begin with, his hair was almost blond, which nobody's in my family is, not at all. Then there was work. "Harrises don't have jobs," he told me. "We cultivate life interests." It sounded like a problem they had learned to accept, like "testa dura" in Calabria.

Mrs. Harris's life interest was human nature. She had the gift of discerning spiritual auras. When she looked at people with her inner eye, Tim said, she could see colors emanating from them. If you were pregnant, your aura was pink; if you were excited, it was red. "That makes most Italians look like tomato sauce," I said. Tim didn't laugh. His mother, because of her ability, was under a lot of stress. She had to visit a chiropractor regularly to keep from falling apart. Mr. Harris's life interest was Heaven. "In my religion that's where you go when you die," I said. Timothy didn't comment. He invited me to his house for dinner.

I had the idea, from reading Agatha Christie maybe, that English people dressed up whenever they ate, so the next day I wore my special event dress, even though we were going to Tim's place straight from school. He always wore the same baggy jacket and scruffy shoes but I figured it was what they call a pose. It wasn't. Everything in the Harris home was baggy and scruffy and also dark. There was no light in the front hall and I tripped over the carpet which bunched up between threadbare gaps. "Nobody's home," I suggested, but Timothy beckoned me on.

"My mother's upstairs sleeping." This he whispered, as though it added something to her glory. I suppose she had fantastic dreams.

The kitchen was certainly no big deal. Timothy filled the kettle with water and got two mugs out of the sink. "Do you think we should start dinner?" I asked. Aside from the buzz and rattle of the refrigerator and a slight smell of mold, there were no signs of food. A shelf above the sink was stacked with different colored tins of tea, with names like adventure stories. Some potted plants drooped along the window ledge but none of them were herbs. Timothy waved towards the oven.

"It's all in there," he said. "Roasting."

We drank tea at the kitchen table while the dinner cooked itself. Timothy kept boiling fresh water and talked about his father who'd just come back from a journey west, into the mountains. "Mountains," he began, and then stopped. He had this built-in timer that switched off his flow of words while the tea got to be the right color. He took off the stained mitten thing that kept the pot warm, raised the lid, fished out the basket of soggy leaves, lowered the lid, directed a stream of liquid into his mug, waved the pot in my direction, raising his eyebrows. That was my cue to show him my mug was still full. He put the pot down, replaced the mitten carefully, extended his upper lip over the edge of his mug as a temperature gauge, and then sipped his tea.

"Mountains?" I reminded him.

"Elevate the earth." He went on to explain.

At five-thirty a creaking noise came through the ceiling above us. This was not random noise but a meaningful signal; I could tell because Timothy jumped up and got a mug from the cupboard. Then he put fresh water on to boil. "I think my aura's a bit soggy," I said, but he didn't smile. He looked flushed and nervous. Sounds continued to come suggestively through the ceiling: drawers scraping, a door opening, closing, water running, more doors, and finally, steps on the stairs. I wondered if I should stand up.

Mrs. Harris resembled her son. She had damp, amber-flecked eyes and pale hair that squeezed her temples and shot out at the back. Her right cheek was creased from sleep and her body was wrapped in something similar to the thing the teapot was wearing, only more crumpled. She needed steaming.

"Hello, Mother," Timothy said. "The water's on. This is Angela. Angela, my mother."

"I'm pleased to meet you, Mrs. Harris," I said.

"Delightful." She smiled vaguely. "What are you drinking?"

"Earl Grey," Timothy said.

"Do you mind horribly if we change to Jasmine?" The suggestion did not devastate either of us.

Mrs. Harris had the same built-in timer as Timothy. I read the names on the tea tins while they waited without a word for the water to turn the right color. Then Tim lifted the mitten, raised the lid, removed the basket which was full this time of twigs and flowers, and lowered the lid, pouring his mother the first cup. A bruised white petal floated on the surface. As she sipped, the crease along her cheek faded. She began to talk.

Not about auras, though; about Mr. Harris. She told us about his struggles with the Society of Creative Business Creatures, the people who had paid his way into the mountains. I didn't quite pick up why they paid or why he struggled. He gave lectures on Heaven, but Mrs. Harris made him sound more earthly than that, like a character in a ballad. Occasionaly she sighed and Timothy muttered "Good good," like a refrain. I felt I should join in with something; maybe: long, long do we wait for him with our teacups in our hands. But it never seemed the right moment.

At last there was a new signal, the sound of a car in the driveway. Timothy leaped to his feet, grabbing the teapot. I thought for sure there was going to be a third blend, Gunpowder Green maybe, but Tim cleared everything into the sink and started piling my arms with dinner plates. It was amazing how fast we all moved. In two minutes flat we had transferred our operations to the dining room and when the door opened, each of us was stationed behind a chair at the table, ready for action.

Mr. Harris did not look like his son. Perhaps there had been a mistake. He was very dark and as hairy as my Uncle Sal, with enormous eyebrows and a black beard that started at his cheekbones and curled around his chin like wrought iron. His eyes were black too. He did not look heavenly. Timothy suddenly went pale, almost white.

"Hello, Father."

"How are you, Tim?" Mr. Harris boomed. It didn't trouble him that Timothy was having a hard time answering. "Good good," he boomed again, turning to me. "What's this? More strays? Dogs. Cats. Girls. What's next?" He winked at me, shaking my hand with his hairy knuckles. This was not fun. I caught Timothy's eye across the table but he looked away. I could see he had abandoned me. A newspaper headline rapidly wrote itself in my head: BOY DELIVERS HUMAN VICTIM TO OGRE FATHER.

It was a dry meal. There was roast beef, roast potatoes, and a squash which had been raised in a dust patch and then baked. Even the gravy seemed dry. There was a jug of water at one end of the table but nobody reached for it and there wasn't much chance to ask to have it passed. Mr. Harris served up mighty slabs of conversation from his end, along with the roast. He was explaining how the world, all of nature as well as human society, was arranged into patterns which could reveal the origins and ultimate destinies of each of us. These patterns were hard to make out because they were covered by the body cloak of numbers and surfaces.

I didn't have a clue what he was talking about but I figured I should listen in case later on my survival depended on it. In History class Mr. Greeves sometimes asks a question to see if anybody's paying attention and in fairy tales monsters ask riddles. If you answer right you win a treasure or a prince. Never mind the prince, I just wanted to go home.

Mr. Harris snapped up enormous mouthfuls of meat and still kept booming. "The essential nature of the person shines through the body cloak as a definable aura," he said, "but what people don't realize is that human institutions wear the same cloaks." He glared at me down the table and I stopped chewing. "They must be taught to read the pattern of hope that the institutional body cloak obscures under its multiple folds and layered thicknesses." He stopped talking but kept glaring at me. My mouth was full of squash.

At home my father always tells us not to talk at the table. We're there to eat, he says. This didn't seem to be Mr. Harris's approach but I didn't want to make a wrong move. Nobody else said anything; there was a long moment filled with scratching knives and scraping forks. I swallowed painfully. Then I faced old Iron Beard and asked what pattern of hope he had deciphered under the folds of the school system. He twitched his eyebrows. I gritted my teeth.

"Our schools teach numbers and surfaces," he said at last. There seemed nothing more to add. From there he went on to discuss the stock market, and some confusion he called anti-patterns. Mrs. Harris, Timothy and I scraped and scratched.

After a while I tried to kick Timothy under the table but my foot met only the thin sticks of the chair he was sitting on. His legs were nowhere to be found. He seemed to have shrunk since the beginning of dinner and it occurred to me he might be suffering from a rare disorder that forced him to drink huge quantities of tea just to keep from dehydrating. I felt sorry for him but more for myself. After all, he'd invited me there. He must have known his father would pounce on me. I waited until Mr. Harris engulfed another potato.

"Are you all right, Timothy?" I asked. Timothy still wouldn't look at me but his mother did, and it struck me that she looked dehydrated too.

"Bit glum, isn't he?" Iron Beard said, still chomping. "Nothing serious, Tim?" Timothy shook his head without lifting it and Mrs. Harris unfolded out of her chair at the far end of the table.

"I'll get the tea," she said.

My interruption would have been wiped out by some new wave of tea, Russian Caravan, say, if Timothy hadn't suddenly choked. At first I thought he was faking because he did it so well, with a comic twist. He flung his head back and grabbed at the air with his mouth. He worked his shoulders up and down like he was trying to fly. It would have made a great scene in a game we play in Drama called "You Die Now." Mrs. Harris and Mr. Harris and I looked on as he clutched the edge of the table and made little squeezing movements with his elbows. Then he turned purple. That was when I figured it was time to go around and thump him on the back, but before I got up he gave a wrenching gag and heaved forward onto his plate, sending his knife spinning towards me. Tim was still alive, sobbing into his gravy. The weird thing was that I had caught the knife. Iron Beard and wife stared at me as though it was up to me to finish the business off.

It was all I could do to set the knife down calmly on my plate. I thought of my father who hates scenes at the table, which he calls thea-tricks, and I wanted to giggle. It was like a tickle in my throat. After a while Timothy stopped crying and we cleared the plates. Mr. Harris dozed at the end of the table breathing slowly in and out. He wasn't so scary with his eyes closed but his beard twitched now and then. When Mrs. Harris brought the tea in I said my mother was expecting me home. It wasn't quite dark yet but I took the long way around. I felt too creepy to go through the ravine.

It was a bit of a surprise to see Timothy the next day. He came to my locker at the beginning of seventh and asked me to skip Drama with him. "It's the last time," he said. My mother says not to leave things unfinished, so I went. It was raining outside and we ended up at Maybee's again. Tons of kids were there trying to keep their cigarettes dry. We squeezed in at the counter and ordered tea and hot chocolate. Dina brought it pretty fast, two styrofoam cups of hot water, one with a teabag floating in it and the other with a packet of powdered chocolate on the side. I asked Timothy what he'd choked on.

"Humiliation and defeat." It was noisy in the restaurant; there was an argument underway involving four tables of Human Geography students. I had to ask him to repeat what he'd said. He called out "humiliation and defeat" so loudly that I was a bit embarrassed. The girl next to me at the counter went on blowing smoke gloomily at her boyfriend. If she'd heard Tim she probably figured we were studying for a test on some play by

Shakespeare. I pushed my chocolate closer to his tea.

"Explain," I whispered.

"Drama," he said, lowering his voice. We were breathing in each other's steam. "I can't bear it."

"That's why you choked?" I remembered searching with my feet for Timothy's legs under his dinner table. I tried to picture Mr. Edwards standing in the Harris's dining room, shouting out the rules for Dragon Gold, but all I saw was old Iron Beard, carving the roast.

Tim nodded. "After you left, we talked. They said I can transfer out. I can take anything I want. I got the forms this morning from Guidance. My father's going to sign them this evening, before he leaves."

"Leaves?"

"On his next trip." He waited for me to say something but I'd lost the thread of where we were going. Then I found it.

"So," I said, swallowing the lumpy remains of my chocolate. "I guess I won't be skipping Drama with you anymore. What will you take instead?"

"Business Studies," he said, and bit a chunk off the rim of his styrofoam cup.

After that our relationship was on a different footing. We made arrangements to meet after school and walked home together through the ravine; he lived on the side with the houses and I lived on the apartment side. It had been a pretty soggy September but early October was like summer; we hung around on the nature trail or sometimes did our homework and listened to albums at Tim's place. Mercifully, Iron Beard had left on his journey, east to the ocean. I turned down invitations to dinner, though. I said my mother preferred to have me eat at home, which was true. Once Timothy came to my place for a barbecue. Some of my cousins were there and he impressed them all by the way he talked. While we were waiting for the charcoal to burn down he told us about his father's travels. "The sea," he said, "is a metaphor for eternity." Nobody questioned him but during dinner they watched the way he ate my uncle's sausages with his fork and knife instead of with my aunt's rolls, like we do. When dessert came he called the hot plate a "trivet" and was surprised we didn't have a "cozy" for our teapot. After he left my brother said he was too classy for me.

The third week of October Mr. Harris got back from the ocean. It was a Thursday. Timothy intercepted me at my locker as the bell rang for seventh. "Skip this one class with me, Angie."

"What about Business?" I asked.

"I need a cup of tea."

At Maybee's he dragged me to a table and brought over a supply of crullers and two tin pots of water. The restaurant was deserted. Everybody was out on smokers' corner in their t-shirts, enjoying the sun. Tim grabbed me by both wrists—quite a dramatic gesture considering our only audience was Dina.

"You've got to help me, Angie."

"Why? What's the matter?"

"It's those commercial types in Business. They're a bunch of deadheads. I'm suffocating in that class."

He calmed down after a minute and released my hands so that I could eat a cruller. "All they see are graphs and ledger sheets. I'm choking on the folds of the body cloak."

"Sip some tea," I said. I was thinking things over. "How long is your father back for?"

"A while. He doesn't travel in the winter months."

"What does he do?"

"Reads. Writes. And thinks a lot. It's a sort of refuelling time for him." I pictured a big blast furnace sitting in the Harris's dining room, vaporizing pots of tea. We sat for a minute or two without talking. Tim was staring out the window; there were kids sitting all over the cars parked on the street below the school. I collected the crumbs from our crullers and put them in my empty cup. That was when the fated dialogue took place. I'm almost positive I've got it straight.

"Tim?"

"Hum?"

"I think you should talk to your father about moving out."

"Talk to my father about what?"

"Moving out. Leaving home."

"You're crazy." It was only afterwards that I realized why he said this. At the time I thought he hadn't really heard me. "Angela, I want to transfer out of Business."

"But it's already halfway through the term."

"I can't breathe in that class, with those people."

"Well then?"

"Come to dinner tonight, Angie." He grabbed my hand, knocking over the cup with all the crumbs in it. "Help me explain."

"Explain what?" I asked. I honestly did not know what he was talking about.

"Please."

"I'll phone my mother," I said.

"Oh God, Angie, thanks." He flipped open the lids of all the tin pots collected around him and called Dina over.

"Promise me one thing," I said after Dina had left another pot of water on our table. For some reason she never bothered taking the other ones away. "Promise me you won't abandon me."

"Of course."

I sometimes wonder if things would have turned out differently if we hadn't dallied, as they say, on the nature trail on the way home. I was in no big hurry to meet Iron Beard in the gloom at the end of their hallway and I guess neither was Timothy. We kind of sat around in last year's leaves, this year's leaves sifting down with the sunlight, and strengthened our alliance. That's when, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the mushroom. I rolled over onto my elbows. "Oh wow."

"What's the matter?" Tim said. I think he thought he had really got to me.

"A puff ball. Look." He watched me crawl over and put my arms around the thing. I was only trying to measure it.

"Don't touch it, Angela."

"Why not?"

"It might be poisonous."

"You're crazy," I said. "It's a puff ball. They're edible."

"Edible?" He wriggled to his feet, damp leaves sticking to him, his hair jabbing palely into the sunlight.

"Haven't you ever eaten one?" I cleared the leaves away from the base of the puff ball and lifted it carefully. Even on the underside it was in perfect condition, a once-in-a-summer find. "I'll ask your mother if I can cook some for dinner. All I need is butter."

"We don't eat mushrooms," he said, staring down. "Unless they're cultivated."

I was amazed. "Do you mean to tell me you won't try even the tiniest little bite?"

He withdrew his eyes from the shining and flawlessly curved surface of my puff ball and made a face. "Put it down, Angela. My mother won't let you bring that into the house."

"My family will make a feast out of this mushroom," I said. To tell the truth, I was ready to abandon Timothy, go back across the ravine and eat fresh fungus sauteed in olive oil with garlic, parsley and lemon. Or fried with onion and eggs.

We left the nature trail and walked in silence up the wooden stairs to the street. Our solidarity was definitely damaged. At the door of Timothy's house I wrapped my puff ball in my cotton jacket and stowed it in the corner farthest from the steps. Timothy shoved open the door and in we went. We hadn't even talked about a strategy.

Iron Beard was there, but in disguise. He had shaved off his beard and around his mouth and chin he looked like Timothy. The resemblance caught me off guard. Still, I could make out the shadow of the old wrought iron curling under the surface of his skin. Besides, he couldn't hide his black eyes.

"You've peeled off a layer," I said bravely.

Nobody in that family once laughed at my jokes. Old Iron offered me his hairy knuckles. "How's Business, Tim?"

"Well," began Timothy, then stopped.

"Actually," I said.

"And the actress?" said Old Iron, booming and glaring at me.

"Well," I said "Oh, fine."

"Good good."

Dinner was a disaster. At six o'clock Mrs. Harris opened the oven and took out a roasted lamb, baked potatoes, and something that looked like a dish of glazed turnips. As Mr. Harris began to carve, I tried desperately to think of some way to start our plea. Five minutes into the lamb I hooked my feet around the legs of my chair; Timothy was trying to kick me under the table. It was no use; I hadn't a clue how to save him. His father chomped and chewed and chawed about eternity coming in waves. "We are little creatures trapped in a tide pool swirling round and round until we settle in the rocky hollows. But the waves will rise up again," he boomed, circling the air with a turnip on the end of his fork, "and float us out on their crests into the eternally breathing sea." Mrs. Harris and Timothy and I scratched and scraped.

At the end of it there was tea, Prince of Wales, and then I left. What was I supposed to do? The days were getting shorter. I avoided Timothy's eye. "Goodnight," I said. He walked me to the front door. I could tell he was taking it badly.

Out on the porch he bent down and picked up my puff ball. His hands were draped protectively in my shirt jacket and he sucked in his chest to create as large a distance as possible between himself and the mushroom. He must have thought the spores were a deadly poison.

"Your mushroom is in danger of being smashed," he said. It was a funny way to put it but I decided not to laugh. He saw me hesitate. "You'd better take it home," he said.

"Yes." I put out my hands and he transferred the puff ball carefully. I somehow knew our relationship had ended.

One day at the end of second term I ran into him by accident at Maybee's. I was skipping seventh with this girl Peggy who got stage fright when our big assignment was due. Timothy brought his tea equipment over to our table. Peggy pinched me. "How are things?" I asked.

"Good good." He held his fingers over the steam escaping from the tin pot and looked at me with his flecked eyes. Peggy pinched me again but I couldn't think of anything to say. We sat in awkward silence while Timothy's tea steeped. Suddenly he flipped up the lid and fished out the bag. "Remember you told me to have a talk with my father about leaving home?"

I was surprised. "Yes."

"I did."

"Really. What did he say?"

"He agreed. He had a long discussion with my mother."

"And?"

"She agreed."

I pondered this uneasily. It would be hard to resist a guy who was living on his own. "So?"

"He moved out a month ago."

"Who moved out?"

"My father."

"He moved out?"

"For a year or so. It was your idea. They thought it made sense. Until my aura gets stronger."

My idea? I was stunned. "Excellent," I said. I couldn't think of anything to add. Peggy kicked me under the table. At least, I think it was Peggy.

"So how was your mushroom feast?" Timothy asked.

"Oh excellent," I said.

He pointed to the enormous textbook he was lugging in his pack. "I'm taking Biology now."

All I could do was nod. Somebody kicked me and I kicked back hard. We all sipped our drinks. At last Timothy heaved his books off the grimy floor and stood up, "See you," he said.

After he left Peggy scolded me for being so dense. I was too depressed to defend myself. We pooled our resources, her carfare and my phone money, and ordered four chocolate donuts.

That was the last time I skipped seventh. Later, in the spring, when the urge hit me, I just pictured Old Iron Beard out there in the streets, refueled and ready to blast. I figured I was safer in the classroom, playing Dragon Gold. ☐

PAUL NELSON

CHILDREN

Light strives between the geese
steering through the leaf-rafts,
arrives between the houses, up the drives,

hunts among the bare trees beyond town
where the buck browses, spent and restless.
Dowses the cedar swamps where does yard up.

When you and I were children, we wanted none.
Children sometimes do, rocking their dolls
their nun-like selves in the shade of lilacs.

That hatchery in the Rockies? The mountains blazed,
hurting our eyes, everything so brilliant, and breathless.
Rainbow trout flashed, dimpled the concrete pools.

We felt like film exposed, thrilled and barren,
wondering at geese, up and down the flyway,
beating the thin, fissionable air.

They mate for life. I don't know why.
It is a sin not to shoot the pair.
Yet we insist and cling.

I like a shed, one dirty bulb, the privacy of woods.
You love a room with high, clear windows.
Don't you remember? How birth left you alone again?

And the little deaths of sex?
I cannot see by light that buries shade,
that cleaves and purifies, by hope

that radiates the schoolyard,
bright as snow over coalfields in Pennsylvania.
Cape Cod is a silver hook I by-pass into Maine,

to the end of the continent of light, where dusk begins,
where the yellow bus looms at 3 p.m., the shortest day,
delivering children in the dark.

ERICA LIEDERMAN

ANIMAL STEW

Illustrations by Mary J. Peterson

Mr. Cochon sat in his chair, laughing contentedly. His fat round belly bulged over the top of his trousers, as pudgy as the pillow mint dissolving on the tongue of his nephew Willardee, the wolverine. Willardee was also plump and happy.

The two had just finished their first meal in the restaurant they had opened together.

"They'll come from miles around to eat here," said Willardee. He patted his stomach and looked around him in satisfaction at the decor in the dining room, the room he himself had designed. The windows were done in lovely green bottle glass, except for a single one that was clear glass and faced west. There was a grand fireplace at one end of the room, replete with an iron soup kettle hanging from a swinging hook, and a roasting spit for roasting grand roasts. The greenish glow from the fire would be visible to passers-by who looked in on cold winter evenings.

The tables were decked with droll red and white checked cloths; hunting scenes of foxes and hounds promenaded the walls.

It was a lovely place, all told.

"Congratulations, uncle," said Willardee, finishing the last of his wine and loosening his belt a wee tad.

"And congratulations to you, nephew," said Mr. Cochon. "We have done a superb job. Tomorrow we will write up the menu."

His uncle was already there by the time Willardee arrived at the restaurant the next morning. He could see his dim piggy shape through the bottle glass window in the heavy oaken door.

Willardee went in.

"Ah, you've arrived," said Mr. Cochon, adjusting his pince-nez to a more comfortable position. "I've decided that the first night's menu will be a mongoose menu." There was to be a different menu for each night, according to what particular sort of animals were the guests that evening.

"The mongoose menu," affirmed Willardee. "Sounds fine to me." He dipped his pen into a little pot of ink that rested on the back of George, a Galapagos tortoise who doubled as a side table when he was not needed as a lamp stand. He was paid time-and-a-half for time he put in as a foot stool.

"Monday evening," said Willardee, licking the nib of his pen absently. "What is it they eat? Eels?"

"Snakes," replied Uncle Cochon. "Braised fillet of snake served with truffles. How does that sound?"

"Delectable," said Willardee, writing.

"I'll even dig the truffles myself." In his youth he had put in his time as a truffle pig; he was an experienced old snouter. "Interesting work," he had commented to Willardee once, "but somewhat degrading to do for long. A good thing to be able to say one has done when it's finally over. Rather like school, or military service."

"Tuesday," said Willardee, "is horse night, is it not?"

"Yes indeed," replied Uncle Cochon.

The menu included pastures of salad along with carrots and turnips, and special entertainment of a dog and pony show.

Wednesday was planned for koalas and opossums: eucalyptus leaves served in sinus-clearing stews. Thursday they reserved for gerbils and kangaroo rats. Their menu required little planning. They would eat sunflower seeds from a silver tray. They didn't even drink water. It would be the chef's night out. Friday night was seal and otter night: fresh salmon and turbot fished from the nearby sea.

"And Saturday, of course," said Willardee, "will be for the birds."

"Did we agree on that?" asked Uncle Cochon, shifting his weight in his chair.

"Oh yes," answered Willardee, smiling at the thought of birdsong in the evening. "I'm sure Saturday will be my favorite night."

"I don't know why you want birds in the first place," commented Uncle Cochon. "They are so excessive."

"We like them, we like them, we like them," squeaked Roberta, Raisin and Red, three kitchen mice whose task it was to look after the crumbs.

"What do you have against birds?" asked Willardee.

"The chickens used to peck at me in the barnyard when I was a piglet," confessed Uncle Cochon with a hint of a pout in his voice. "Then when I went on to become a truffle pig, bevies of grouse would leap out and frighten me in the forest."

"Hm," said Willardee, scratching his head. "How unfortunate."

"Birds," said Uncle Cochon, his voice growing louder with a resentful passion, "birds are the only ones of God's creatures who can shit on you from a great distance and then fly off before you can even curse at them."

Willardee scratched his long nose, a bit embarrassed by his uncle's outburst. "Perhaps," he ventured, "perhaps Saturday should be cook's night out rather than Thursday."

"Yes," said Uncle Cochon. "That's the best idea. Closed Saturday and a lion's feast on Sunday. Roast venison. Game. Rabbit. Quail in mint sauce. No birds at all."

"But if we exclude birds," ventured Willardee timidly, "we would be picketed for discrimination. Placards would be put on our gateposts. We would be shut down."

"No one needs to know," replied Uncle Cochon.

"People will talk," pleaded Willardee. "We will be discovered and run out of town. We'll be arrested." He had such supplication in his voice that Oswald, the moose who worked as a portable rack for damp dishtowels, poked his head out the kitchen door in unabashed curiosity. He was compelled, as are the best of us, by displays of balefulness. He shook his head in sympathy so that the towels hanging from his antlers flapped prettily like doves taking flight.

"Such complications," he sighed and headed back into the kitchen.

"I suppose birds it must be, then," relented Uncle Cochon with a sigh. "But there will have to be a bouncer."

"I know just the one," smiled Willardee, much relieved. "His name is Henry. A very responsible ostrich."

"Fine, fine," said Uncle Cochon with a dismissive toss of the hand, "as long as there's someone."

The menu would consist of grass soup,

bird seed; wine and animal crackers for dessert.

The first week proceeded smashingly. The mongooses gave the chef a standing ovation, and the gerbils and kangaroo rats sang "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" to all the staff and management in twelve-tone harmony.

Then came Saturday. Uncle Cochon paced about nervously, now poking his head into the kitchen, now rearranging tables and chairs, muttering to himself all the while: "Don't like birds. They make messes with no warning and fly away from them with no warning. Perversion of free will."

"But what's wrong with flying?" pleaded Willardee, trying to avoid conflict. "I think it would be nice to fly, actually."

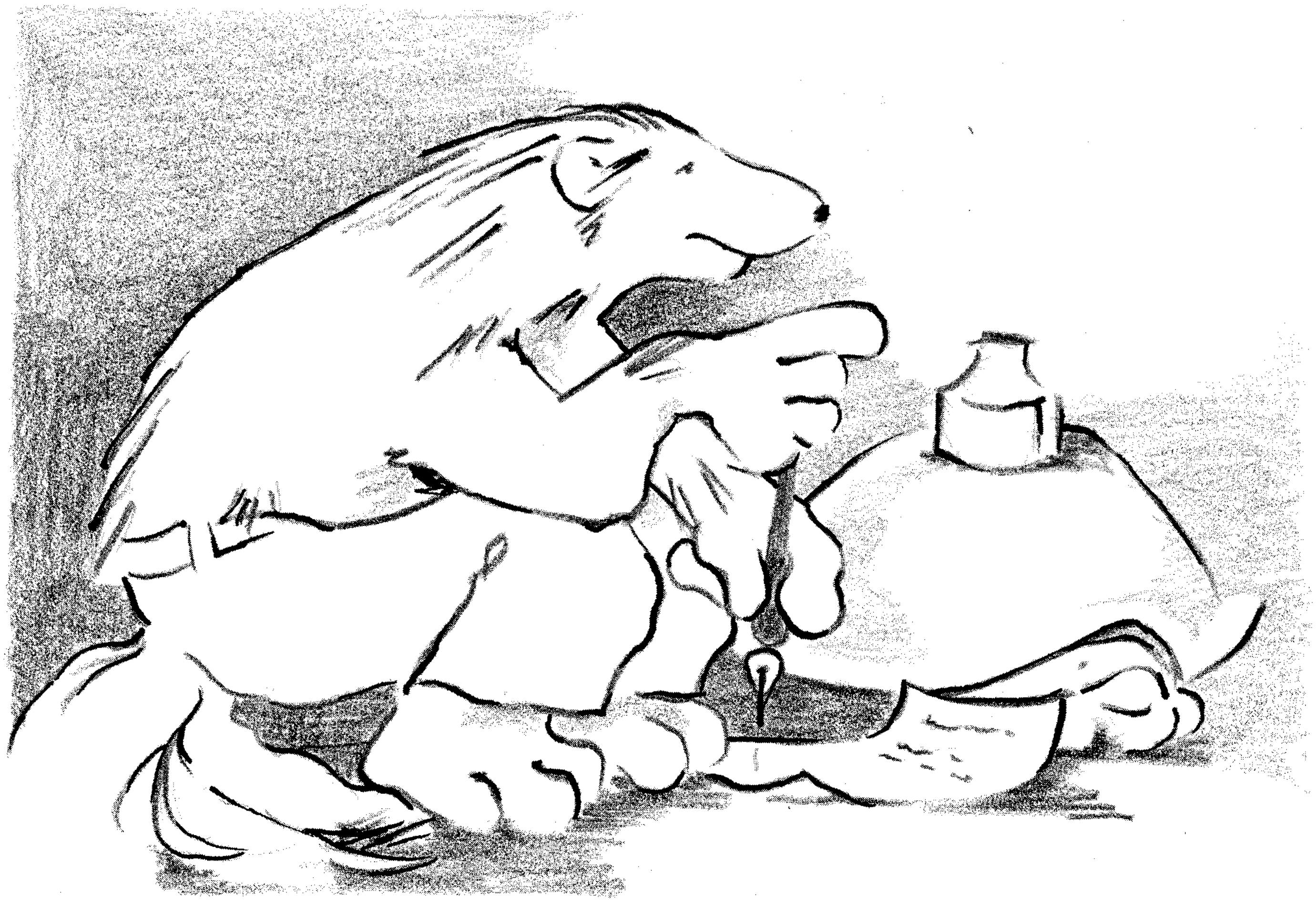
"Yes," said Uncle Cochon. "They can fly off and see the world whenever they like. And the rest of us? Earthbound by no choice of our own. Plodders, slitherers, crawlers, burrowers . . ."

Willardee had never heard his uncle so philosophical. It made the skin on the back of his short little neck positively prickle.

"Uncle?" he said at last. Uncle Cochon was standing now quite still, staring out the single clear glass window towards the fields and forests beyond the road.

"Yes," he said once again, still facing away. "The rest of us are all creatures of the earth." Then he turned around and gave Willardee such a blank and distant stare that for a moment Willardee did not know where he was, and had to pinch himself once or twice and unbutton the top button of his collar.

That night the birds came. Ravens, sparrows, and kingfishers who took turns diving



into the salad bowl and fishing for tomatoes; secretary birds; humming birds who didn't eat but drank nectar from the flowers that had been put out for decoration. Canaries sang from light sconces; ospreys and hawks practiced their dives from overhead beams.

"I knew it," said Uncle Cochon, standing in the doorway to the kitchen. He sat down on a nearby chair and put his head in his hands.

Henry could not even begin to do his job. Each time he snatched at an unruly bird, the creature would laugh and take flight. Henry flapped his own useless vestiges in anger, and cursed them in all the languages he knew.

As for Willardee, he ran back and forth from one part of the room to another wringing his hands and pleading for moderation and temperance in a general sort of way. A parrot landed on his shoulder just long enough to recite an obscene tongue twister, and then flew off again.

The night wore on. They gamboled and sang; they drank and drank and drank. They drank more than all the others; they drank case after case of wine. There was nothing for Willardee and Uncle Cochon to do but sit at an empty table and wait for them to tucker out and leave. But they stayed and partied and there seemed to be no end to it. Finally Willardee could bear it no longer and in a state of total exhaustion left for home.

He returned the next morning before dawn, and went timidly inside. Nothing was broken outside of a few glasses and the ewer that had held the bird seed. There were a few holes here and there in the carpet where candles had fallen. But most notable were the bodies of intoxicated birds. They lay strewn around in groups of two or three—on chairs, under tables, even, in the case of a stuporous buzzard, from crossbeams in the ceiling. His long neck and claws dangled downwards, swaying gently as he breathed.

Willardee poked his toe at a peacock who had passed out on the short stairway leading to the coatroom. It moaned faintly and rolled over, bumping gently onto the next step.

"Quite a mess, isn't it?" Uncle Cochon had emerged through the passageway that led to his rooms on the upper floor. He held an icepack tenderly against his crown.

"It's not that bad," said Willardee without much conviction.

"Isn't it?" asked Uncle Cochon. A sparrow lying underneath one of the tables stirred feebly and stood up. He took a few wobbly steps, flapped his wings once or twice and sank to the floor again.

"I suppose we should clean up the mess," said Willardee.

Uncle Cochon did not answer.

"Are you ill?" asked Willardee anxiously.

"No," answered Uncle Cochon, lifting his head. He looked at his nephew, and suddenly his face had quite a different expression. There was a faint glint in his eye and the slightest crease of a smile on his lips.

"I'm quite well now." He smiled. "It's Sunday today, is it not?"

"Yes," answered his nephew, a bit confused by the question. "Yes, it is."

"Lions tonight."

"Yes," affirmed Willardee, who liked to think of himself as always having things well in hand. "Lions." He followed his uncle's gaze to a pheasant nearby who had roused himself and stood jostling his companion of the previous evening, a young pink flamingo who lay—spread-eagled, as it were—at his feet.

"Come on, Maxine," he was saying in a nervous, throaty voice. "I want to get out of here."

"Wha . . . ?" replied Maxine blankly, awakening only after the fourth or fifth prod. She looked up heavily at the pheasant, then moaned and rolled over onto her other side.

"Lions," said Uncle Cochon, rising to his feet. "How advantageous. A most economical evening."

"Economical?" Willardee rose as well. "But they eat all sorts of expensive things. Venison. Great roasts."

"No matter, no matter," said Uncle Cochon walking towards the kitchen. "Imagination with new ingredients is one of the best attributes of our chef. I have decided that there is to be a slight change of menu."

"Change of menu?"

The sun had come up and the early morning light shone biliously through the windows. Several of the birds were beginning to awaken now. They rubbed their eyes and shook their heavy heads.

"Yes," said Uncle Cochon, disappearing into the pantry. "We shall be serving fowl instead of meat. Marinated, pickled and stewed in its own juices."

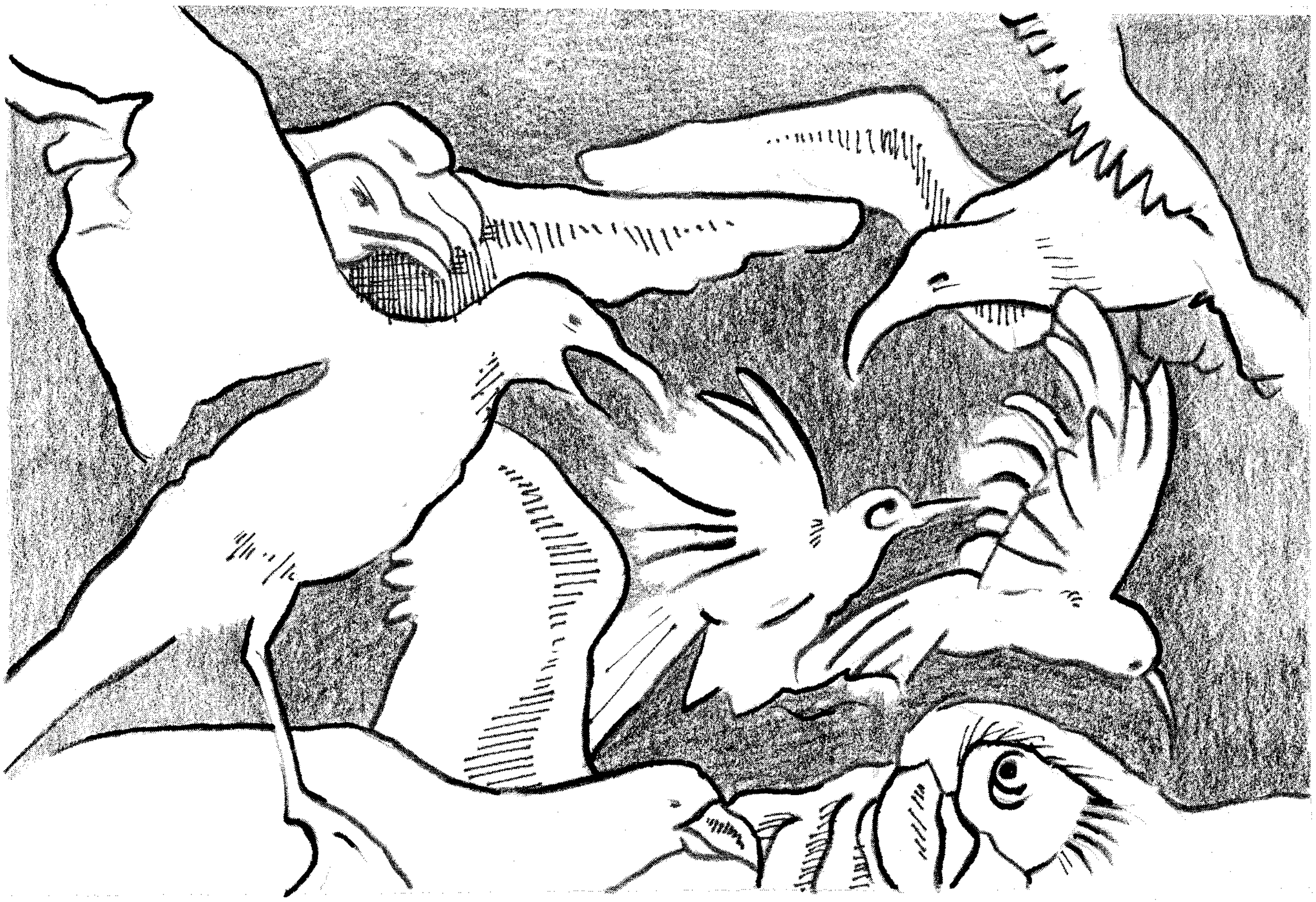
"Fowl?" Willardee looked about him at the drowsing birds. A blue-footed booby preened its feathers clumsily under a nearby table.

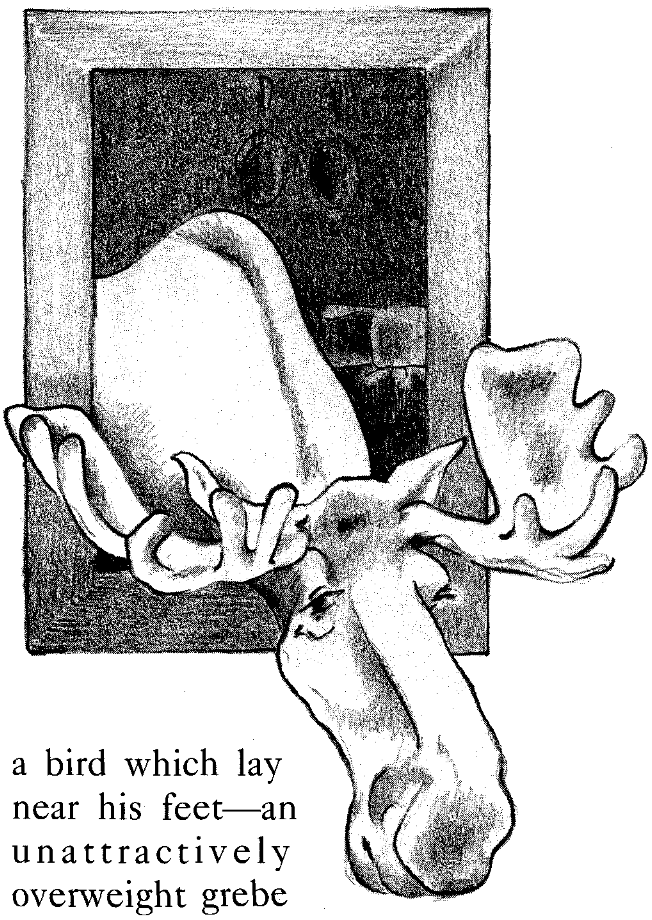
"Fowl?"

Uncle Cochon emerged a moment later carrying a large white table cloth.

"Help me," he said, unfolding it. Willardee took hold of one end. The cloth formed a sling between them.

Uncle Cochon bent down and picked up





a bird which lay near his feet—an unattractively overweight grebe—and tossed it into the cloth.

"Fowl," he said, bending down to pick up another, this time a besotted brown pigeon. "Let them eat fowl. Filthy creatures." He held the bird aloft in his fist for a moment and looked at it before sending it tumbling the way of its predecessor. "When civilization has passed and everything is completely gone, all that will be left besides crabgrass is pigeons and sparrows and a few sinewy albatross." He let the pigeon fall.

"Uncle," spluttered Willardee. "How can you do this?"

"The only difference between feeding birds to the lions and feeding them steak is that we don't have to pay for it." Uncle Cochon plucked birds off the floor busily, as though harvesting some sort of exotic winter fruit.

"But Uncle," protested Willardee. "It doesn't seem right. They were our guests."

"Guests, pests," replied Uncle Cochon. "Meat is meat. The source doesn't matter."

"Well," said Willardee, watching the variegated pile of feathers in the middle of the cloth grow larger and larger. Most of the birds seemed entirely oblivious to their destiny. One crow, who had barely come to, did cry out as he landed on top of the pile with a faint poof of feathers:

"But Maggie, is *this* what you meant by falling in with the rest of them?" Besides this, there were few protestations outside of an occasional groggy chirp.

And as Willardee watched his uncle gathering them up one by one, he began to think of the evening meal and what effort he himself would be spared if they indeed served birds. He would not have to go to the market in the city, for instance, to purchase pounds and pounds of fresh venison. He looked at his uncle, and could not help noticing how truly satisfied he looked as he tossed yet another bird over his shoulder into the bulging bushel.

"Meat is meat," he said to himself softly, testing it on his lips to see how it sounded, this attitude, when it came out of his own mouth. Not at all bad, really. He bent down and experimentally lifted an unconscious chaffinch off the floor. "What do I care where it comes from?" He opened his hand and watched the little yellow body drop into the pile. "It's all the same, anyway." Then he said it aloud. "It's all the same, anyway." He picked up a cardinal and let it too fall in. His uncle turned to look at him for a moment. Then he smiled a sweet, fatherly smile.

"I don't mind now quite as much," said Uncle Cochon, "about having birds on Saturday."

"No indeed," smiled Willardee, glad that life was once again peaceful and full of contentment and as it should be. ☐

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Day 81

Max lost his parole, of course. The Ladies' Hunt must have come along just after I left him. I watched in the rearview as I drove off; watched Max kneel beside the girl, massive shoulders bared to the sun as he spread his khaki shirt over the still form.

Day 1

Spider led me into the lounge, walking with a limp, one hip higher than the other, tapping an uneven dance on the horse-worn surface of the cobblestone aisle. The prisoners' lounge was a square mean room at the end of the stable, between the two aisles of stalls, a room with a single arm of sunlight through the window, Kansas dust dancing in the light: like looking through a net. Beyond the window was the sand paddock, where even on that first day her horse was there, standing tail to the window, left hock bent, head lowered to nuzzle Queen Anne's Lace growing on the other side of the fence.

Inside the lounge, halters hung from hooks along the back wall, nylon leads lay coiled on the tackboxes, and metal cinches dangled from a rack above the window: horses understand control. Weights littered the cement floor, six bars and fifty plates of different sizes. Spider led me inside and straddled a bench next to a man who lay flat on his back, stripped to the waist, pressing a bar above his head. I counted the plates: he was working three-fifty. He pressed once, twice, ten times more before Spider lifted the bar from his hands. The man sat up, shoulders smooth and pink and bald as babies' heads.

"Max," Spider said. "New dude, Max," he said.

Max turned to look at me, flat-faced man, still straddling the bench. Lit a cigarette and held it between raw pale lips, lips like bacon curled around the cigarette. Began lifting his legs, taut beneath khaki regulation slacks. Lifted his legs straight up: one, two, five, fifteen; I stopped counting at fifty. Cigarette going like a chimney, Spider with his hands cupped all the while beneath the butt to catch the ashes, hot gray dust in his hands. Max smoked hard, drew on the weed with pulls that brought his narrow chest in against the ribs, in and out. I pictured the lungs: flat gray cells interconnected with veins, each cell breathing with a life of its own. There is a place beneath the sternum, a triangular cavity between a man's ribs where you can puncture his heart with no more than a pencil in your hand. In and out.

Spider said, "You ask Max, he say we got all we need around here. Cigarettes and chicklets. Huh, Max?"

"Uh huh."

"Press weights when the going's soft. Between cleaning and feeding. Keeps the belly flat and the guards at a distance. Huh, Max?"

"Huh."

I said, "What's a chicklet?" and Spider laughed, a boy's giggle.

"Something we press when we're bored with the weights," he said. "Right, Max?"

"Shut up," Max said. "Shut up and get me a towel."

"Sure thing, Max." Spider, one hand still beneath the butt, now no more than a red bud of light, reached for a towel from the dispenser beside the sink. "Water, Max? You want it wet?"

"I'm wet enough," Max said, and Spider wiped him dry, neck first, then arms and shoulders; the stub of weed fell to his hand and he placed it gently on the lip of the sink.

"You're looking fine, Max," Spider said, working the towel on the arms, up and down, across the shoulders. Across the chest of matted hair, oddly dark against the smooth pink skin.

Men came in from behind: Bobo and Tyde. Shirts clinging like webs, brown cloth blackened with sweat. Faces broad and flushed and scarred. Army faces. Fort Leavenworth men on work parole wear their faces like masks.

"New dude," Max said, introductions all around. Bobo took my hand and took my wrist too, closed his fist all around. I would not, did not blink. Slap on the shoulder from Tyde, a Black man's hello. They sat on bales of hay behind us and the show was on.

"What happened with Karl?" I said, knowing that it was Karl I was replacing; I saw them bring him back, Karl alone in the van one afternoon, three guards on him, hands cuffed above his head. Thought he was crying but too hot to tell; tears could have been sweat.

"Never you mind," Spider said.

"What'd you hear?" Max said, reaching for another cigarette. "I need a drink," he said, and Spider leaped to the sink, one hand already on the paper cups stacked in a tower behind him, white paper cups with yellow flowers printed on the edge, wax edge to chew and spit. Max took a swallow and tossed the rest to the floor. Water into dust, then only dust at our feet.

I shrugged. "The Van Man told me Karl wrestled a guard. Louie said he wasn't holding his own; you had it in for him."

"Briggs? What'd he say?"

"Briggs told me he maimed a horse, took a knife to its ear. I say, if Karl did that, he deserves worse than he got."

"What'd he get?" Max said.

"Solitary two months. Then poultry."

Bobo chuckled. "Some talker, that Karl. It was a Colonel's horse, too."

Spider said, "Yeah, he ain't ever let a horse so much as look at him cross-eyed. He's one tough dude."

"Karl was West Point," Max said.

Routine

Out of the gates at five, into the van, old man Briggs at the wheel. Briggs was older than the gates of this hell, wore a tilted cap and did not believe in the spoken word of man or men. Morning taunts: Hello, Briggs, Hey Pillow Belly, how does your wife find it? 'Less she uses your pistol instead? Wire cage separated prisoners from driver. We sat on wooden benches in the back of the van, gum wrappers and empty butt packs on the floor at our feet; the van smelled of tobacco and piss.

First stop, the hog farm; was going to be my duty but told them I was allergic to pork, even to the walking kind. Poultry farm next, wouldn't have been bad work; lighter, too, but no stink worse than chicken stink in summer. Hot Kansas summer, airless days and nights no cooler, only darker. Stable was the last stop going out. We played Blackjack on the way in for matches and butts.

Day 23

Just after three weeks on the job I found out what Max was in for. Tyde told me, softly, under his breath he spoke as we dug shavings out of the rear barn to bring in for bedding.

"But you ain't ever going to say a word, now," Tyde said. "Not to nobody."

Max killed a woman. He was stationed in Nam, behind a desk. Seen with a woman they found dead later in her room.

Routine

Early duty was morning feed, tearing open hundred-pound bags of oats to pour into a silver metal long-handled cart. I worked my aisle with Max, who could bench three-fifty when I first knew him and tore bags open without cutting them first, pulling at the nylon with both hands, sleeves rolled up. We moved through the barn without speaking, too early to talk, morning light an aureole of heat beyond our dark cool passage. Horse heads floated in the darkness on either side, bobbing endlessly on their dusty sea, horses kept in wooden plank box stalls, 12 × 12, larger than prison cells, bars three feet from ceiling to door. Blocks of salt, milk white and yellowed with horse spit, balanced on metal hooks from every door: sometimes I took a lick. Sweet stench of Omalene and alfalfa all around. When the horses heard us open the grain room door there was a sound, a collective sigh, a witnessing of our early morning movements.

Day 34

"What'd you do, anyway?" Max said. "I never saw you on the inside before."

Break-time in the lounge, Tyde shoulder-pressing two-ten from floor to ceiling, black arms shining like stirrup leathers in the light cast in through the window that touched his back and fell about him in pieces, shattered by his darkness.

"That's cause they ain't never let you see nobody when you was in," Tyde said, laughing, grunting as he turned his wrists up and out: Atlas balancing worlds of metal.

"Grand L, ten to fifteen. Armed and AWOL, five more. No money in the hole, parole after three," I said.

"Judge in love with you, Boy," Bobo said.

"You one hell of a talker, that's for sure," Tyde grunted. "One brain-man, too."

"Takes more than brains to make it with Max," Spider said.

"Yeah, and you sure are proof of that," Tyde laughed.

"Max don't like talk like that," Spider said.

"Easy, Spiderman," Max said. He looked at me with canine eyes, beaten to the floor too often but ready to fight eyes. He said, "You know horses?"

"I was born on a horse," I said.

Routine

Break between feeding and cleaning, pressed a few, up to two-thirty on the bench after only a month. Max had a tattoo. I liked to watch him press: I liked to watch the tattooed snake climb his bicep with every lift.

After feeding came cleaning, sixty-two stalls, more than twelve for every man, but some horses cleaner than others, did it all in a corner. Could scoop up the buns with my hands if I wanted, toss the firm round balls into the wagon, but rules set against this by the Army. Got to use a fork like you're eating dinner, pick them up three or four at a time. Put lime and clean shavings down after, made me sneeze and turned my hair white. The horses rolled in the clean bedding and we bet on the number of turns. I saw a horse turn forty times on its back, legs waving in the air.

Some horses were never turned out, not even while we cleaned, but kept behind bars until the children came, let off the schoolbus to pour into the stable like pieces of fruit, bright-colored and sweet. Max's chicklet was sweetest of all, came at three-twenty in the afternoon when the sun was not as high as midday but hotter, hotter.

Day 46

"So what's it feel like?" Max said. "To get on one. What's it like?" Big man, pressing the bar, sweat running in rivers down his neck, forming pools in the hollows of his collarbone. Never been on a horse. Worked in the stable eleven years without getting on a horse.

"Max is a chicken," Spider said. "He don't like 'em because once one stepped on his foot and another time he got bit. He got bit in the seat of the pants while he was feeding. It was some sight, hoo boy!"

"Tell me," Max said, still pressing, not looking at Spider or me, not looking at anything but his own shadow, thrown up against the wall, the shadow of a machine nearly human, pistons moving up and down.

Outside I could see her horse, the bay horse, hide brown and dappled, the color of fertile earth moistened by dew, black tail high behind. Three-thirty in the afternoon. Station wagon pulled up, parked in front of the paddock, chicklet got out with her mother, went to call the horse and put her hand on its neck. Her hand was small and pale against the dark hide. Her mother dressed in black boots and tan breeches, the pants cinched tight above awesome thighs. Spurs on the boots, a prisoner's pin-up: smooth avian throat rising from the open-necked white blouse, slender enough for a single hand.

Spider saw me watching, said, "Not bad for gray moss, eh? But Max likes his cherries before they're off the tree. Huh, Max?"

"Shut your mouth before I close it for you," Max said, watching too now, eyes on the shadow of a girl beside her mother, small form lost in over-sized trousers, black hair cropped as short as my own.

"You were talking," Max said, turning away from the window to set the bar down gently on the rack and reach for the shirt waiting beside him, wrinkled cloth still in the shape of a man. "You were saying what it felt like," he said.

Closed my eyes, somehow easier that way. My father was a cavalry man, put me on a horse when I was three, sat me in front of his saddle, let me take the reins. At six I ran away, took the pony out of the barn and rode seventeen miles before they stopped me. Rode fast across the golden cloud of earth: I can still hear the wind; feel it against my face.

"You stand on the left side of the horse to get on," I began. "I don't know why, but they always train them that way. You take the reins in your left hand, the pommel in your right, and swing your leg up and over. Can't touch the horse's rump or he'll bolt."

Goethe said that the horse, weary of liberty, suffered himself to be saddled and bridled, and was ridden to death for his pains.

Routine

On Wednesdays the chicklets came to the stable after school to take riding lessons from Colonel Masters. They tacked up the horses, darting in and out of the stalls with bridles and saddles, after grooming them first with hard rubber curry combs. Or sometimes they groomed them with shedding blades, metal-toothed blades with leather handles; they ran the blades across the horses' backs and bellies, sending clumps of hair sailing like birds out of the stalls to land on the cobblestone floor, only to be snatched away again by the breeze.

Before the lesson began they came to watch us, in the doorway they stood, four or five of them, all ages, to watch us lift. Bobo and Tyde put on a show, tossed each other weights, flexed their muscles to make the chicklets squeal: we are Prisoners on Parade, they cried. Max's own chicklet was smallest among them, nine years old and shy, never spoke but always looked at Max, hands folded before her, bearing an invisible gift. Max smoked his cigarettes sullenly; Spider worried about us all.

"Get them out of here," he said. "Get them out or there'll be trouble."

We watched the riding lessons from the upper barn before doing the afternoon feed: school horses moved in the ring about the Colonel, who stood majestically in the center, ring master and whip bearer. Trot, now, he'd call, and heels kicked dust in the afternoon sun. The children rode with foreheads damp and furrowed beneath black velvet hunt caps. Posting trot, he cried, and tiny bottoms in tan breeches moved up and down. Wrong diagonal, hold the inside rein, heels down, elbows in, eyes straight ahead. Don't slump don't arch and don't I repeat don't ever ride the reins. Save the horse's mouth!

"Will you just look at that kid ride," Max always said, watching her. "Soon she'll be on the hunter's course."

Day 68

"You can touch him if you want," I heard her say. I came around the corner of the barn, pulling the afternoon's silver chariot of grain, thinking of my own stall and my own fare of beef stew or chicken pot pie brought around on bright plastic trays, no knives passed out with the bread and butter, the sound of the key in the lock three times a day or sometimes again in the evening.

I came around the corner of the barn and saw Max there with her, his hand on the horse's neck, the girl high above him, small head capped in black velvet, toes dangling loose in the stirrups as she brought his hand to her horse's neck. The horse breathed once, hard, and shuddered as Max ran his hand down its withers, almost to the saddle, where the girl sat watching.

She said, "Don't be afraid."

Routine

Thursday mornings we laid the trail for the Ladies' Hunt. The Colonel's wife told us, in lavender scented breath, where she wanted to jump, and we brought the fox bag over the trail early in the morning, Max and me, while the others fed. We took the pickup truck, a green truck with four-wheel drive and "Fort Leavenworth Hunt Club" painted in bright yellow on the doors. We drove the truck along dirt roads, and I got out with the scent and brought it close to the jumps, to the brush fences and stone walls and creeks, to fallen nurse logs and paths nearly overgrown by ferns, greenery spread like palms beneath the sky that was splintered by the trees, the slender birches and maples that arched to clasp limbs high above me.

Day 73

Spider was right. There was trouble. One day she came into the lounge, spurs clicking on cobblestone, voice city-tough.

"Listen, you," she said to Max. "You've been talking to my daughter. You've been bothering her."

"I ain't," Max said, eyes lowered to the weights at his feet. Easy, Max, was all I could think, seeing his big fists clench at his sides.

Woman shook her finger at him, like shaking a stick at a dog. "Listen. My kid knows your name, that's how I know you've been talking to her. 'Max,' she says. Max this, Max that. She's got no business knowing a prisoner's name. I can have you put back inside," the woman said. "Put back in where they'll seal you up tight like you're in a tin can. I can have you put back like this," she said, snapping her fingers.

"Lady, I didn't do nothing," Max said. "Once I helped her on him when he shied at the mounting block. Another time I set up a row of jumps for her. That's it."

"I don't want you near her," the woman said. "You come near her again, you'll be lucky if you're out in another twenty."

Then she was gone, heels sharp on the floor.

Spider said, "Told you there'd be trouble."

"Aw, don't you pay no attention, Max," Bobo said. "She's just jealous you didn't help *her* up onto no horse."

"Time to feed," Max said.

Day 81

Setting the trail for that Thursday's hunt I asked him, "Ever think about trying to leave? Like when we're out riding in this truck I wonder what it would be like. Just to drive out of here, I mean. It wouldn't be so hard."

Max laughed. "Except everybody I know who's tried it is worse off now than when he started. Ain't no sense in thinking things would be better on the outside, anyway."

"How do you figure?"

"Look at it this way. We were in the Army, right?"

"Right."

"In the Army, they told us what to do. What to wear. How to cut and comb our curly locks. When to go to the toilet. Now we're in prison and I can't see a whole hell of a lot of difference."

"We volunteered for the army," I said.

"Ain't no such thing as volunteering," Max said. "You really think you volunteered to pull that job? Then they got the wool pulled over your eyes, Man. There's times in life when you just don't got any choice at all. You just do what you have to and hope you get along."

When we finished the trail I looked down the hill below the road and saw them. "They're starting the hunt," I said.

We could see the women on their horses, hounds buzzing at their feet like insects. Chicklet's mother rode an Appaloosa, and led the group at a canter across the field to the first fence, a brush fence set up just before a three-foot creek. The horses moved in a line, toy figures of brown and black and yellow streaming across the field. The dome of blue sky above them was hemmed by poplar trees along the far edge of the field, and as the horses took the fence the water sprayed around them; the creek was on fire, each drop of water a rainbow ember.

"Glad they're not chasing some poor damn fox," Max said. "Look at those bitches run."

Routine

At night sometimes they showed films. They had them in the cafeteria, where we sat in rows along the rectangular formica tables in plastic scoop-bottomed chairs; the plastic sweated in the heat. We sat like school children, the fan above our heads turning lazily, like a great bird circling, waiting to land.

If they didn't show movies then we had dances. They decorated the cafeteria with tin cans and wine bottles and streamers. They played rock and roll. I usually danced with Max but Tyde was better, all over the floor, down on his knees and then leaping to touch the streamers hanging from the ceiling. When he caught one he'd find a man to tie with it, tied them in bows around our necks.

Day 23

When Tyde told me what Max was in for I said, "Do you think he really did it?"

Tyde said, "Man, you can't ask a question like that. You just can't. You seen Max lift? He'd lift you clear off the ground and toss you through the window like you was a baseball. You seen his hands? And anyhow. Do you think it matters what the answer is, yes or no? He's here, ain't he?"

I knew Tyde was right but I wondered anyway.

Day 46

"Once you're on the horse, the rest is easy," I told him. "Use your heels, and the horse moves forward. Use your reins, the horse stops and turns. Once you're running it's like flying. Ever watch a horse run? Picks all four feet off the ground at once.

"Listen to them breathe once you're on. Horses breathe easy when they run. You got to keep the rhythm and let the horse have its head. Trees flow by, fences, fields: like watching a movie. Nothing is real but you, you and your horse."

"You fall off, though, and it'll step on you," Spider said.

I shook my head. "You fall off, it'll steer clear. Doesn't like bad footing of any kind. Never kick you on purpose unless you deserve it."

Day 81

"We could drive this tank straight through the gates," I said. "Plow down the guard and head off for Kansas City. Hop a cattle car out of the slaughter house and take it to New York. They ship to New York most every day." I laughed. "We could disguise ourselves as sides of beef."

But Max wasn't listening. He said, "Look ahead."

I looked, and there she was. His chicklet. The girl on her horse. The bay ran along the side of the road, a hand gallop, tail high, neck arched, small girl perched on its neck, insignificant.

"Looks like she wants to join the hunt," I said. "But they're not this far yet."

Even over the noise of the pickup we could hear it: the sound of hooves, steel-shod hooves on the paved road.

"Looks like trouble," Max said.

The kid was holding tight, hands no more than a foot from the bit: something must have spooked the horse. He was running faster now, back flattened out, muscles working beneath the dappled hide, muscles rolling at the shoulders and haunches. Kid's mouth was open, eyes straight but almost shut by the wind. No helmet, must have lost it on the way. Then a sound like a cat's cry: the kid was screaming loud enough to be heard above the sound of hooves, above the sound of the pickup. There was a jump ahead, a stone fence topped with wire that bisected the road a hundred yards ahead of her. She'd have to jump it or swerve onto the road.

"Sweet Jesus," Max said, and then it was over. The horse swerved to miss the fence and the kid was tossed against the wall, thrown hard against the stones to fall limp in the tall grass, a crumpled pile of cloth.

I went for the ambulance. Max stayed with the girl.

Routine

I am convinced that only optimists believe in God, or people with imagination. I am not an optimist, yet I believe. Still. It takes so little imagination to live like this, to cross the days off the calendar one hour at a time, to watch the moon become clipped to a thumbnail size as the nights go by.

And to press two-fifty one week, two-seventy the next, takes no imagination at all: only practice. □

ALAN FELDMAN

SELF-PORTRAIT

Near the door, Van Gogh's face glows like a moon
An aura of green light centered on the right eye.
A mud-colored, impasto coat. Lapels of electric blue.
A purple clot near his collar. It's not a tie
Or a flower. Maybe it's meant to be a brooch
Or an unhealed wound. If we start with a button
On his vest, move up to the eyes, we approach
The idea of man as a constellation. Whatever he suffers
Can't be personal. Forehead like a headlight, he stares at us
Steady, pale green. "You perish," he tells us
Broadcasting his single-frequency message. "What matters
Is that everything blazes away to its dust
In pain. Take it from me. Or my green wall.
You're born. Trees wave their wild arms. And that's all."

INDIAN SUMMER

Autumns I stay in New England. At night I sleep places: where I am. Now I don't care where, before I did. Just off the road, under trees, back in the brush—all that matters to me is no one sees. But I stay off the main roads and back into the country, so they never do. October comes in and it's dry: cool, dry days. Nights cold dew forms on my shoulders walking along the ocean. I hide, stay in shadows, steal my food. I eat: apples, clams, once I found a lobster trap washed up in the shallow water. A boat had cut its line and it rocked back and forth, wood slats grey and rotten in the moonlight; inside a lobster and some crabs. I threw the crabs back and ate the lobster. And no one knew. October comes, days long and warm; I feel the autumn but never here. Trees stay green, and even the sumacs don't turn. But I wait on because I know one day they will.

I went into a farm house poor and broken in the country. Old man and woman asleep in bed. They snored. The man loud and dry, rattle, rattle, until it hurt me to hear. The woman, she snored calm and quiet, a gentle swell and ebb of breath, and her breasts moved so gentle under flannel. I could have put my head right there so soft she would never know, but I'm very tough and didn't. Ate fried chicken from their refrigerator. But not chocolate cake. I'm hard inside and not a child, so I didn't. I stole jugs of brandy from the cellar: peach and apricot. With chocolate icing I left a little note on the smooth formica counter: Thank you for dinner and drinks. I left a perfect chocolate kiss on the counter. My lover never spoke.

And I live wild in this forest. Around me only green. When my sleeping bag is wet I lay it over tree branches in the sun and it dries. It never rains here. Only summer sunshine allowed, even though this is October autumn. Sometimes farmers catch a flash of me, streaking evening wind through their cornfields. Tourists from New York, Philadelphia, see me from their low cars, wading slow through the shallows of the Brandywine. They turn their heads back to be sure and I'm always gone. I am morning mist on the grass; smooth as glass. I roll over these hills like waves on sand. *—Prudy Grimes*

UNCLASSIFIEDS

LADIES MAN

She is up to her hips in doctor. His sunstained hand maneuvers her closer to get a better view of her uterus, all the time talking non-stop. He always calls her his favorite patient, infatuated by her profession, as if genitals were designer-styled, all the time thinking fashion models are whores. Focusing on black lace panties she threw carelessly over a chair, hatpin eyes get lost in his smile: Well my very dear, everything feels fine, just fine, now I'll palpate your breasts, check your coil, and if you should ever need an abortion, adjustment, advice, any little thing at all, just call . . .

With a flourish of hands, a short bow, he exits, leaving her to collect dangling legs and slip into something more comfortable. *—Roberta Metz Swann*

THE OLD WAITRESS

A very old waitress with a long gray braid worked in the cafe. Men who came there over the years joked about the gray braid because its color never changed and it never got any longer or shorter. They knew it was a fake. Sometimes they could even see where the bobbypins held it to the back of her head. But the braid was not the only thing about this waitress that did not change. When customers walked in, she always greeted them with the same word. She always said, Order?

There were many ways the men could answer that question, like

Order be a law against this weather
or Order in the court!
or Order day I drunk too much.

The old waitress did not smile or answer when the men joked about order. She would not even look at them until they ordered food. Some men thought she secretly liked their jokes about order, but most of them figured she was as ornery as she looked with her fake braid cutting the air behind her like a cattle whip.

Then the old waitress did something no one expected. She died. Now the men joked about her fake braid. Hey, did you hear?—the old waitress hung up her braid.

But when those men went back to the cafe, it was closed. And the very ones who joked about the braid stood in front of the cafe, looked at the sign, and cried. The sign was in her own handwriting, and it said, Out of Order. *—Jim Heynen*

ALL THE YOUNG FAUSTS

Many of the high technology firms in Silicon Valley encourage their employees to dress up for Halloween. Mine is no different. At least a hundred-and-fifty of us, more than half of the company, donned masks, came in drag, wore elaborate make-up and costume, or tore our clothes and greased our hair in imitation of punk rockers. It was great fun, and the personnel manager felt she had succeeded in raising our morale.

Then why am I depressed?

I came as Mephistopheles. My wife spent a half-hour making up my face. I had a dark cape. My hair was black and slicked back. I looked, I must say, foreboding.

When I arrived at work everyone was thrilled that I had gone to such lengths. The first people who saw me, the women in the accounting department, made quite a fuss. They said I made a devastating Dracula. Or, was it Wolfman?

Now, I didn't mind being mis-cast. After all, my costume did not come from the dressing rooms of Hollywood, but from my own meager closets. I corrected them in a friendly way.

"I am Mephisto," I said.

Their faces went blank.

"Mephistopheles."

More blankness.

"Faust? Dr. Faustus? Christopher Marlowe? Goethe?"

They stared at me uncomprehendingly.

I explained the literary allusion of my costume and they were very interested, glad to know. When we parted, I excused their ignorance (in my élitist, sexist snobbery) by saying to myself, "Those were just the girls from accounting. Why should they know anything of English and German literary tradition?" Why indeed.

My depression lingers not because of that first encounter, but because my day was filled with blank faces. Not one—not a single employee—knew Mephistopheles from third base. Again, I didn't mind being praised for my likeness to Dracula (or Wolfman), but when corrected, everyone, without exception, said, "Who's Mephistopheles?"

These are not uneducated people. After a while I kept track of those who did not know: an MBA from Stanford, two MBAs from Santa Clara University, a Ph.D. from Case Western Reserve, a business major from Boston University, a BSEE from Kansas State, a Masters from Columbia, a BA from San Diego State, a BSCS from the University of North Carolina, a BA from the University of Wisconsin. The list goes on.

The one thing all of these people have in common, besides their ignorance of Mephisto, is their involvement in high technology. These people are, as they like to say, the "shakers and movers" of tomorrow's technology, tomorrow's economy, tomorrow's society. Having been involved with high technology for more than five years now, and noting the glamour, appeal, and the undue influence it has on society, I fear they may be right.

High technology, and the scientific achievement that drives it, seems to be enough for them. The knowing and understanding of literature and the arts is irrelevant to them. As one young computer science genius said to me after I had explained (for the umpteenth time) just who Mephistopheles was, "I didn't study any of that stuff. It was unimportant."

Margaret Bremner

I suppose I could have rationalized that the Mephisto character was an obscure aberration in Western thought, but that's not so. He is critical to our tradition of defining good and evil, right and wrong, commitment and deception, justice and salvation. The idea of Mephistopheles fueled the imaginations of Marlowe, Goethe, Mozart, Shaw, and Mann, among others. When our young "shakers and movers" of tomorrow believe such work and ideas to be "unimportant," what does that tell us about our future?

Joseph Wiezenbaum, a computer scientist at MIT, wrote in his book *Computer Power and Human Reason* that science "has virtually delegitimatized all other ways of understanding." He added that contemporary literature and art, once the educated person's foundation for "intellectual nourishment and understanding," have become "perceived largely as entertainments." We have, in other words, become hoodwinked by science and technology.

Our new generation of technologists does not seem to bother with literary tradition and the intellectual dilemmas that provoke great art. To them, the world and those of us who dwell in it can be reduced to a knowable formula, computed and filed. There is no room for questions without answers, ideas that don't fit into the equation. What they know *is*. What they don't know *isn't*.

Perhaps through the tools of science and technology Mephistopheles has bargained for the souls of all our young Fausts. Perhaps he has finally won.

—Mark Hall

THE ARGUMENT

These kitchen knives have split chicken breasts. They have minced livers, halved lemons and ripped skin from pears.

There is no food that tastes in this kitchen, so I'll try the knives. I'll grate slivers of steel for the nutmeg on your eggnog. I'll shave edges of Gillette blueblades and embed them in green peppers on your pizza.

No blades will twist into your heart, only shards, tiny fragments prickling at your esophagus, your stomach lining, your intestines.

This keeps you answering, this paper money that covers your breasts with lace and pearls, fills your gaping mouth with oysters and bread, satisfies your outstretched hand.

I'll stuff your cavity with these bills, then truss you. I'll crumble the wads tight and drop them down your gullet one by one, clothespins in the milk bottle. I'll tear them into flakes and collage your eyes, and you'll never stop seeing the color that drives you to dance and sing and say pretty words.

Green glued to your belly, crocheted to your pantyhose, braided in your hair as you lie in state.

ALMOST MAGNIFICENCE

She had been magnificent, almost. But now, trouble was, she leaked at the edges. Maybe somebody hadn't sewn the seams straight enough. God's sawdust doll, dripping flakes of sawdust.

For a while, concerned about the litter, God hired somebody to follow her around with a whisk broom, but that proved a full-time job and people had their own responsibilities. So God said, "Gee whiz, you'll have to take it from here, honey. I've got a lot to do. More dolls to make." So she just leaked around town, incrementally.

Trouble was, after a while, the leakage affected the order of things. Her husband couldn't sleep at nights for all the sawdust in the bed. He disappeared. Her child, allergic, sneezed too much and had to be asked to leave. Her brain slipped down to the esophagus, the heart sagged, and her uterus got stuck in a knee joint when it finally gave way to the termite-like excavation.

"Ma Ma," she cried like a Baby Cuddles. "Ma Ma." But her mother was gone, blown away like a crisp autumn leaf.

"Da Da," she cried, not like a Baby Cuddles, but sort of. But her father was gone too.

So here was this almost magnificent lady walking around town, saying, "Ma Ma" and "Da Da" and leaking. People felt sorry for her for a while. After all, she had been beautiful, and her mother had always dressed her in lace and Mary Janes. But when she started to wear banana peel skirts, fresh cherry earrings and halved apricot pasties and started to say "Whoo-ee," people shook their heads and wondered.

She thought about taking a job at the new health food restaurant in town because her outfit would be appropriate for the lunch trade. But a hungry customer, not able to wait for his fruit salad with herbal dressing, might snitch one of her half apricots. With this in mind, she relapsed into her "Ma Ma" and "Da Da" routine and bolted the door.

Alone with her three cats, who liked her sawdust mixed in with their kitty litter, she dwindled down to a few powdery body parts, which her pets mistook for catnip. *—Phyllis Barber*

CHRISTMAS *CHEZ NOUS:* In Response to a Query

Chez nous, shameless late risings. Nude sunbathing with intimate friends on the flat section of the roof. Repeated screenings of Visconti's *The Damned*. Languid dining on potted reddeer, raw Icelandic oysters, opium pills, Everglade wild boar. Medieval French Christmas carols around the piano. Explosions of ritual joy. Closed-circuit television featuring shameless wrestling matches from Nogales. Promiscuous betting: vainglorious winners and sullen embittered losers. Rhymed couplets for those friends who failed to survive the year. Toasting of Stars & Stripes eggnog, *chez nous*.

Chez nous, caspian caviar interspersed with differing opinions on the War. Nude diving and swimming in the icy river. Huddling in blankets, crouching over gay crackling fires, vigorously warming hands. Eyes aglow, cheeks flushed. Perilous intimacies afterward to be regretted. Anisette-soaked bread pellets. Backgammon, bezique, Authors. Old Maid. "The Song of the Volga Boatman" around the piano. Weeping in the shower. Aimlessly sitting around, *chez nous*.

Chez nous, frenzied unwrapping of lavishly wrapped presents. Midnight telephone calls to unusual geographic locations. Minced pig. Plumbed footing. Pipcane. Missiletoad fool. Anisette-soaked madeleines. Gat-toothed whistling competition. Poodle competition. Dropping of ink-bombs on neighborhood children. Reading aloud of old love letters. Hosanna hoop skirt dancing. Caspian rebozo dancing in authentic costume. Lithuanian puppets, Hungarian horns and cymbals. Washing faces in snow. Voluntary declarations of marital fidelity. Murmurs and sobs through the floorboards. Denunciation of the profit motive. Opium-soaked madeleines. Such is the world's great harmony, that springs from order, union, full consent of things!—*chez nous*. *—Joyce Carol Oates*

WORLD CHAMPION

The World Champion holds his cigarette between his teeth and points it straight ahead. He smiles without letting his lips touch the cigarette, and when he smiles there are dark spots exposed on his teeth from the cigarettes he smokes and from neglect. A World Champion must arrange his priorities, and there are certain personal needs which must be postponed if one is to contend with others who want to be champion of the world.

Everywhere he looks there are people who stare at him, photographers push their way in front of each other to get closer and closer, for each editor wants the best picture for his magazine and pictures of World Champions must be taken at the race track, because everyone knows that a winner does not have time set aside for personal interviews and private photo sessions. And because the World Champion is Italian, there is even more fervor, for Italians are relentless in the pursuit of their heroes and each printed photograph must be superior to the previous, for there is no one in Italy who is not an admirer of a World Champion if he is Italian.

The World Champion is calm on race day, because he has worked at the same job for several years and even though he must perform his obligation in only an hour's time, he must remain in control of himself. In order to put out of his mind the distractions which nip at every move he makes, the World Champion has taken his helmet and set it on top of his head and turned it backwards so that the face shield is watching where it has been, while the face below is watching where it is going. The photographers laugh in unison when the hero perches his helmet atop his head, and the shutters of a dozen cameras begin to chatter and electronic motor drives expose a hundred frames of film in mere instants, for the World Champion has made a joke, he has reversed his helmet and made himself look like a clown in a circus, and the fans who buy the magazines will want to see the joke that a World Champion has made.

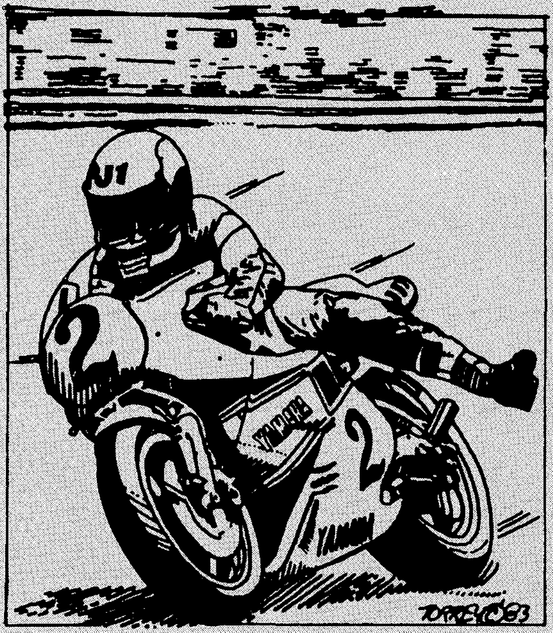
Only a few see what a World Champion really looks like, because he must come out of his garage compound only a few minutes before a race, and there are others who prepare the motorcycle and who must start its engine, revving it slowly at first to warm its vital liquids which are pumped and forced through hundreds of passages, and who will, when the oils are warm, speed the engine higher and higher until the tops of the pistons have expanded from the heat and have been blown free of carbon deposits developed by the few minutes of slow running. When others have held the brightly painted and polished vibrating beast until it has become a howling, shrieking, shaking, fearsome thing ready to attack anything which prevents it from performing its singular function, only then will a few get a look at how a hero appears. And the hero has made a joke for his admirers, because he is walking around with his helmet on top of his head backwards.

A World Champion puffs on his French cigarette and takes relaxed looks at the hills which rise slightly above the corners and turns of the race course, and as the thousands of spectators become a blur of colors, he consciously works at slowing the beat of his heart until it becomes as if he is nearly at rest. If he were sitting above on the grassy rises beyond the fences he would be on holiday, and he would be sipping wine, eating small pieces of white cheese his lover had cut and popped in his mouth, followed with grapes and other sweet things. He would be reclining on blankets, lazily collecting the comforting rays of the mid-morning sun and speaking German to laughing German girls, French to the French girls, and Italian to his lover.

That's what race fans do, for at six o'clock the evening before, they put away their tools, or close their shops, or walk out of their offices and go home to pack their baskets with food and wine and blankets and umbrellas and put it all in their cars and drive to whatever country sponsors the Gran Prix. They wait patiently while crossing borders, drive slowly through long lines of weekend traffic, sleep uncomfortably in their cars and trade driving duties through the night in order to be at the next country's World Champion Gran Prix. And now they relax in the sun by the thousands while below, the throngs of mechanics and machinery move about the race track like small bugs crawling over the carcass of a long black twisted snake.

And the World Champion looks up at the waves of color, he coaxes his eyes to blur and relax, and when he has allowed them to become accustomed to wander on their own, he orders them to narrow their focus and look for something that is always there. He sifts his gaze through the mesh of the fence and the slats of the crowd control barricades and into the reds and yellows and greens until he sees the long dark tube of the telescopic camera lens, its bright shiny single eye staring at him from far away. He concentrates on it until he becomes as singularly and sharply focused and as powerful as the lens itself, and when he stares immovably and the photographer realizes that the World Champion has sought out his camera, when he realizes that the eyes before him are more powerful than his telephoto lens, he presses the shutter to cut off the eyes penetrating his existence and he looks away, and then the World Champion knows that he is ready.

On the day of a World Championship Gran Prix race, wealthy men with villas high in the mountains or low along the old cities lining the rivieras awake much earlier than they are accustomed. Sometimes they lay aside the fine clothes or bathing suits which they might wear on any other day and take up overalls or aprons and reach the complex of garages shortly after the sun is up. Hands which are usually busy with fountain pens or stacks of papers now spin needle bearings and squirt oil, and as the bearings whine, the hands have not forgotten how to caress hardened steel which has been machined to a fine gloss, and the hands are happy and the sliding pieces of shiny metal slip without a sound against one another, separated by the tiny film of special oil, and everywhere there is the perfume of lubrication. When the wealthy man has finished with the oils and the fuel mixtures, and when he has conferred with mechanics whom he has known for most of his life and he has determined in his mind that the machine is as perfectly tuned and prepared as possible, he sits in a chair and stares at the creation. He marvels at the technical achievements which will allow it to slow to a crawl from great speeds and then accelerate to over three hundred fifty kilometers per hour in seconds, and he remembers what it was like years ago to feel the forces of gravity press him against a fuel tank and to have the twisting suspension beneath him flatten out until there is no room between the coils of the springs. He remembers what it was like to weigh only one hundred and twenty pounds and to pull a creation of flexing steel and squirming rubber around a tightly radiused curve when it would much rather go straight. He remembers what it was like to have cheek bones which he could see in a mirror and to have dark shiny black hair and what it was like to have different parts of his body freezing and sweating at the same time and what it was like to have the heart of a lion and the love of a young girl. And occasionally, the wealthy man will take the briefest of instants to consider the World Champion, for the World Champion is merely a piece of property which can change hands for a considerable, but not unobtainable amount of money. If he wishes to know what a World Champion does before a race he need only ask himself what he might do in the same situation, for the World Champion is just a man who has not yet gone to work, only a man like other men who is waiting for an alarm clock to awaken him, or for a factory buzzer to signal that it is time for his shift to begin its duties, or a man waiting for a flag to drop, or that he is a man whose time it is to walk into another room for a few moments. A man whose time it is to address God and to cross himself. Might the World Champion and the wealthy man want to change places, if only for an instant, for an hour?



Before large factories may claim that their methods are best, their machinery superior to all others and, therefore, the wisest choice for the buyer, they must seek to develop the finest racer they can. What one firm may do poorly, another firm may do exquisitely, and all will experience failures. If a rider wishes to be World Champion, he need not concern himself with people or committees or boards of directors, but he must concern himself with things he wishes were trivial and the responsibility of others, for even a World Champion must avoid failure. Once he has been successful and recognized and signed financial agreements guaranteeing him large rewards, he may take comfort in knowing that he may proceed toward acting like a hero, but he must take risks to achieve and maintain that status. If he fails frequently he knows that now he is not able to control the speed of his heart and his eyes are no longer as powerful as the lenses of expensive cameras, and that some day soon he will have to hold his cigarettes with his fingers and walk with his helmet and his head pointing in the same direction, and he will be called upon to start his own machine and hope that it sings as it once did.

There is always a period of time before the Gran Prix when everything goes wrong. The officials cannot get the photographers off the tarmac. Assist crews have rolled the machines into the wrong starting positions and they must be shuffled into the proper places. Craziness and mayhem predominate, riders cannot find their machines and machines cannot find their riders, for each may be in the process of eliminating their respective fluids. When everything has been made as controlled as possible and dignitaries have been properly introduced and the correct flags have been waved, the riders place their helmets on and lift the visors, for the visors sometimes cloud over from the breath exiting the nose and the mist will impair the rider's vision. The riders will look around in the final minutes while their mechanics hold the vibrating machines in place, flicking the throttles further and further, warming the liquids, obliterating all other sounds. They will look down the long straight stretch of black asphalt, they will look at the colors in the crowds and at each other's machines. The World Champion will do all of these things and he will look to the eyes of his lesser competitors. With the helmet in place, nothing at all can be seen except the eyes and all riders know that there is no such thing as laughing eyes or smiling eyes or happy eyes or sad eyes, for it takes a face to create the emotions that others say the eyes reveal. When the visors are closed and snapped in place, even the eyes are gone and the assistants hop quickly over the pit walls; it is nearly time for the World Champion to go to work. If he performs his duties well and in his practiced fashion and has a certain amount of luck he will have earned his wages. If through some fault of his own, or the miscalculation of a machinist hundreds of miles away, or the error of a mistaken engineer, or merely bad luck, the flag will drop and the howl of unleashed engines will launch the unrestrained geophagies away from the World Champion who will detest the existence of everything known to man which has left him standing alone while the thousands look at the escaping pack, and then, when the rest are out of sight, they will look again at him, facing the line of wealthy men standing upon the retaining wall.

And if that one who was left standing alone was a World Champion, he would step off his machine and wait for his assistant who would come for the broken creation and they would walk to the exit. He might remove his helmet from his head and reverse it, take a cigarette from a mechanic and stick it squarely between his teeth, walk to the wall and wait for the first rider to come diving down off the high banked turn, past the cheering crowd and the wealthy men, the French girls and the motor-driven cameras recording the instant of an instant, and he would replace the smile and begin the very intense search for the bright shining eye of a telephoto lens that must be somewhere high on a hill, lost in a crowd. *—Stephen B. Schultz*

THE RESOLUTION OF MUSCLE

(a libretto for one voice or many voices.)

Sylvia Plath says, in THE BELL JAR, that the years of her life stretched out before her like telephone poles, end to end.

I see it more this way: the years ahead are before me, each one in the shape of dumbbells or a Universal machine in a gym.

I see it this way: Bench press, Shoulder press, Leg press. . .

Like Sylvia Plath was, I'm young enough, still, even though I'm not that young any more, let's face it, to make momentous changes, earthshattering decisions. So . . . I can do high repetitions with low weights and grow thinner and trim down and tone up . . . or I can do high weights and low reps and grow muscular. Achieve definition. *Real muscles.*

I can PUMP UP!

Some day I could even enter a show, a competition, and pump up those muscles, wearing the most revealing bikini on earth, showing lots of sinewy flesh . . . Nothing like sashaying along a beach having men ogling me . . . This would be like . . . Like *work!* I'd be AT WORK! It would be like being told by the boss that you're indispensable, or by your students that you're the best teacher they've ever had. Not like a sex show, in other words. A MUSCLE SHOW!

But I've got three children, a husband, parents in Forest Hills. What will they all think?

Honey, my husband says, sure, tone up, firm up, trim down . . . not that you don't look fine the way you are, of course . . .

Of course.

Mommy, say my three children, in unison, how come you're never around making brownies any more? WHERE ARE OUR BROWNIES?

What in the world, says my mother, do you want to do that sort of thing for? Can't you . . . find something else to do with your free time?

Free time?

My father, he's silent. He always was.

My best friend, she says, you've got to resolve this one way or the other. What's this business of sneaking off to candy stores to look at musclemen in magazines?

Hey, it's not the men, I insist . . .

Sylvia Plath, I understand, was not especially muscular. This is not meant as a strike against her. Obviously, she had something else to do with her free time. Not Bench Press, Shoulder Press, Leg Press . . .

I copied from her. From Sylvia. I wrote a poem.

FOR SYLVIA

On a moonlit night when all was
calm
Something happened down on the
farm.

A young girl lifted one too many
bales of hay,
Her body filled out, her muscles
said Hey!

On a moonlit night in the middle
of the city
Something happened to a girl very
pretty.
She went to the grocery and bought
Daddy's sixpack,
And when she got home, this girl was
stacked
with
muscles
shouting
Hey!

There's a group of us at the gym: Laura, Sandy, Dotty, Belinda, and me . . . We're the early evening gang. The men have a separate room.

> Laura: I'm mostly working on my inner thighs . . . also the fanny . . . I used to be thinner in high school . . . My husband well, we're separated . . . and I . . . I . . . emulate him.
>
> Sandy: With me, it's different. I'm a big girl, but flat-chested. So I do lots of stuff for the pecs . . . Bench presses and a trillion Pully things . . . It's all embarrassing!
>
> Dotty: I'm thirty-six and already my doctor says watch out, not much longer. The other women are extremely supportive. I don't look in the mirror.
>
> Belinda: First I tried running, I hurt my knee. Then I swam, but wouldn't you know it, my great luck, I'm allergic to chlorine. Some of the women's magazines said why not try this, so I figured okay, why not? But it's like sadomasochism, if you ask me. Basically I hate it, every minute of it. I can't wait until my knee heals and I can try running again, even only one mile a day, better than these medieval torture devices!

So, you see, none of them exactly share my problem. None of them are pressed to resolve an issue right away like I am. High reps and low weights or low weights and high reps? It's a dilemma. I can change the course of my life, create myself anew, either way. EITHER WAY! My God! But which way? How shall I be born again?

MUSCLES are so seductive. They seduce me. They infiltrate my dreams.

Also, I wrote a song.

RESOLUTION

(to be sung by a chorus of five women: one short and extremely muscular, wearing a bikini; one tall and thin, almost gaunt, wearing running shorts and sneakers; one large, fleshy, and voluptuous in a clinging, low-cut satin gown; one in a sensible shirtwaist dress with posies on it; one with her face veiled, wearing a dramatic black pants suit, holding a silver pen and a pad of paper in one hand)

Each of us has a problem
Somewhere in our souls . . .
Each of us has had to face something
Has had to change, to mold, to bend, to grow.
Oooo . . . Oooo . . . Oooo . . .

Who may we turn to for advice
When life seems hard and without peace . . .
Each of us has had to seek help from somewhere
Has had to ask and plead and query and persist.
Oooo . . . Oooo . . . Oooo . . .

When we were young we climbed telephone poles
And trees and played with rocking horses and dolls . . .
Now we are older and our joints are stiff
And dolls remind us too much of our children.
Oooo . . . Oooo . . . Oooo . . .

Sometimes I feel very alone. So very alone. We live in a house not far from the bus line, though . . . It was my grandparents' house for a long time, until their deaths on the same exact day in different places from different causes. I feel them in every room, every corner, every dust particle. Spooky. But it doesn't make me feel less alone. My children leave their things all over the house. That also doesn't make me feel less alone.

My husband wrote me a note one day. He left it by the phone.

> *Dear, whatever you decide to do we will be behind you, you know that. Keep up the good work. Your family is your friend!*

But that still doesn't help with the issue. The issue remains. I am going to do it—to do SOMETHING—one way or another. No matter what. They misunderstand the issue. They might think my issue is slight. They're wrong. It's deceptive, and big. Which way? Low weights, high reps; high weights, low reps?

Fashion magazines or muscle magazines?

No magazines at all?

Shall I just wing it, play it by ear, see what happens, do it by mood, by color, by weather, by song?

So. What is the resolution? I've read all of Sylvia Plath's poetry and decided she was quite credible. And interesting. And enticing. I empathize more than you might think. But I do wish that she had just once done some Leg and Bench presses, some Bicep curls and Tricep extensions. Who knows what might have happened then? That's how large this issue could be, you see.

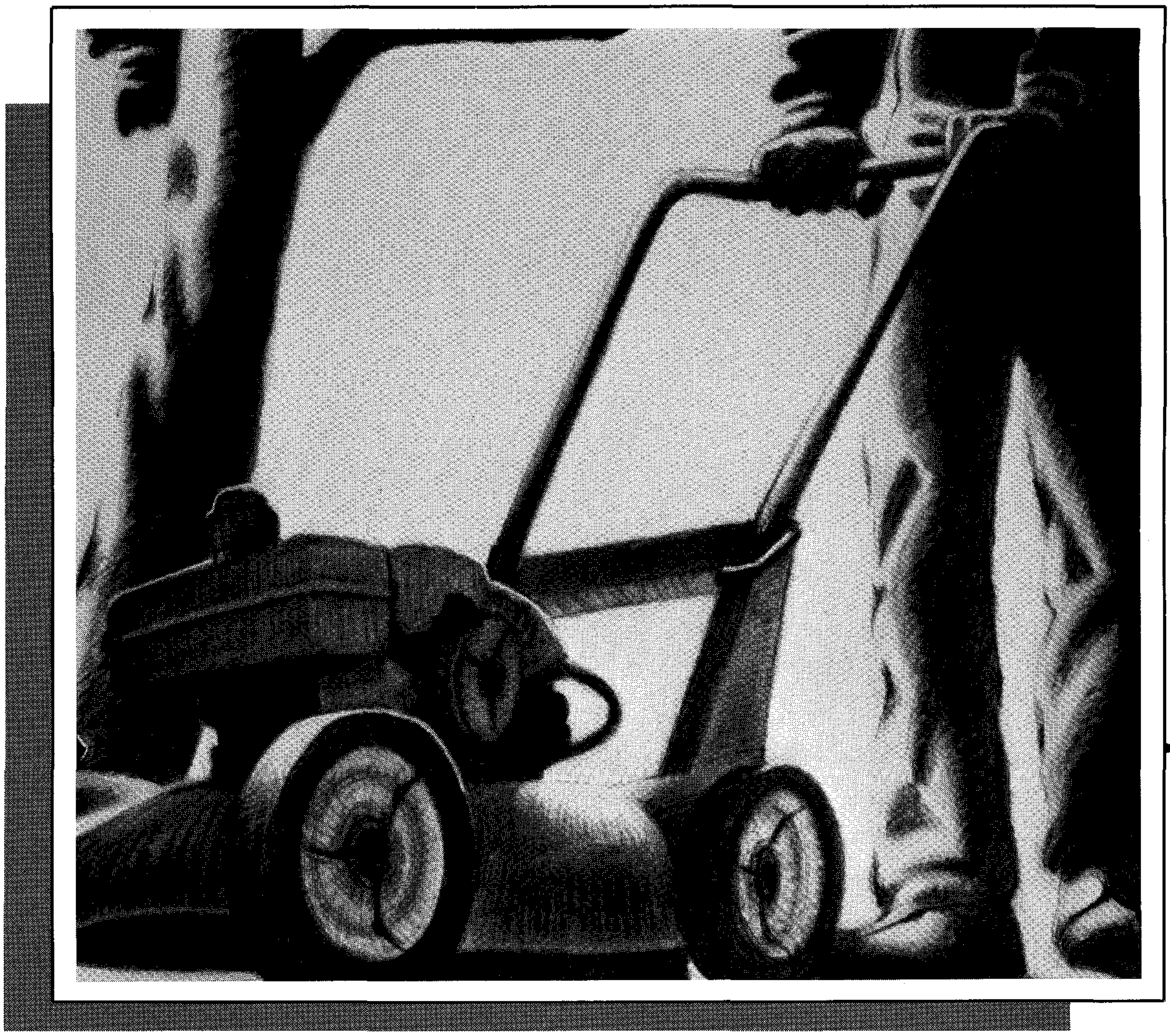
I resolve . . . I resolve . . .

To be strong . . . for starters. To press . . . forward.

—*Janice Eidus*

MAL

HENRY H. ROTH



Once upon a time, out of nowhere a car appeared and headed straight for Mal Bennett. "Long time, no see," the engine roared, and the clanging muffler agreed. The car embraced Mal, really soul-kissed him, then said "Farewell," tossing him back onto his beloved sacred lawn. Moments before, Mal had been observing a new shift in background scenery. Diagonally across the street there had always been an empty high-weeded litter stop for passing car droppings; it also was a very favorite haunt of loose and walked dogs. Suddenly the lot had been transformed into something not better or more interesting; but merely the stage for a shoddy, rapidly aging, unoccupied two-family dwelling. One positive fact Emily brought up right away—far less litter would be hurled at a living area and the local dogs, too, would lose their prime hangout. However, Mal immediately perceived that now all those damn dogs in their mighty confusion might begin trotting over to his spacious property. And so Mal's surveillance intensified. The new house and its concrete front and back lawn disturbed and mocked him; two or three times a day Mal strolled over to confirm its shoddy exterior and attempt to guess the gloomy future of its occupants. It was on one of those daily excursions that a noisy car with Jersey plates saw Mal and fell hopelessly in love with him and went right over to say hello.

Mal Bennett had always guarded his lawn from trespass and was always on the lookout for wily bugs, idle kids, nasty dogs, and bully weeds. A great new fool had recently moved into Ripley—a young stoned hippie who walked with his dog but never used a leash; therefore, the huge gross animal was free as a wild beast to chase squirrels, harass cats, attack other male dogs and running children, and—most important—foul all the lawns in the county. Twice the dog had been clipped by passing cars as its dumb owner railed against the innocent drivers and his innocent beast. All the great fool had to do was leash his property! But soon it was Mal's turn to be struck down. The astonished drunk/punk driver froze at the wheel, spying this old man run right up the car's hood and tear and claw at the windshield wipers before the fool could be flung back to his own property.

Long long ago for a Father's Day assignment in the third grade, Mal's daughter Paula had written: "My father is pretty great. He loves my Mommy. And he loves me too, of course. We have plenty to eat but we aren't rich. We have no pets. My father is a very hard worker in his store and at home. He works very hard on his lawn. My father never gets mad at any of us. I think he loves the lawn best. He watches it grow and always plays with it every day." Paula had been a most troublesome child—very bright and relentless in receiving poor grades, barely graduating high school. She had two abortions before her senior year. In time she married; in time she also divorced. No one was really surprised about her divorce, though it was the first such split in the Bennett family archives. When the car hit him, for a long articulate moment Mal wheezed, "Damn! It's Paula driving. I just know it has to be." But it was some drunken kid from New Jersey whom the police were never able to trace. The lawn was beaming under lovely spring sun as Mal landed back down on his perfect lawn, soft as a cottontail.

Mal knew and accepted that his life was not done, but surely not undone; that is, in many important aspects it was all over. On the final Thursday of each spring and summer month there was a village pickup for unwieldy possessions. For the longest time, there had been no carting away at the Bennett residence since Mal perceived correctly there were no more wasted possessions to be ever picked up—no more wrong or obsolete choices. Also, Emily would no longer tolerate lovemaking. Told him right out. As a token of past times she would toss his organ if he insisted, but *he* and *it* were no longer to have any entry to her body. No smooching or touching, either. Her eerie voice had filled out the empty moon-soaked room. He tried to understand, then did understand and he didn't bother Emily ever again for any damn thing. The lawn, too, seemed to be on its own. Fungus, crabgrass, dandelions, and stray weeds never loitered; still Mal carefully balanced and fed the soil proper vitamin dosages and checked and rechecked—for a lawn was still like an incredibly healthy robust child that could be mortally felled by the common cold.

Mal was not a friendly man—consistently, coldly polite to his children, grandchildren, neighbors, and strangers. When he first landed face down on the lawn, passersby didn't even notice anything awry right away. As one wise guy kid put it to a peer companion: "Lookit! Mr. Bennett's humpin' his lawn!"

Emily's mother had noted Mal's obsession right away.

"Oh, he loves that lawn, dear."

"It's not another woman, Mother."

"You can tire of another woman, you know."

"Silly."

"Mal has a cruel side."

"Stuff and nonsense."

"He's cutting down all your beautiful trees."

"Mal explained. He said eventually they will have to go; they'll topple during storms and clutter up the yard and possibly damage the house. Dead branches will always be underfoot. He's explained it all, Mother."

"Dear, we all have to go one day, but we don't run around assassinating each other in our youths!"

"Oh, Mother! Mal works hard at the store and at home. He's just a very hard worker."

"Emily, I do hope so."

Mal was slumped on the far corner of the lawn, staining that edge pretty bad. For months afterward, the boy from Jersey returned with his hit-and-run Buick and circled and recircled the block, waiting to see if the old man would dare begin another quixotic assault.

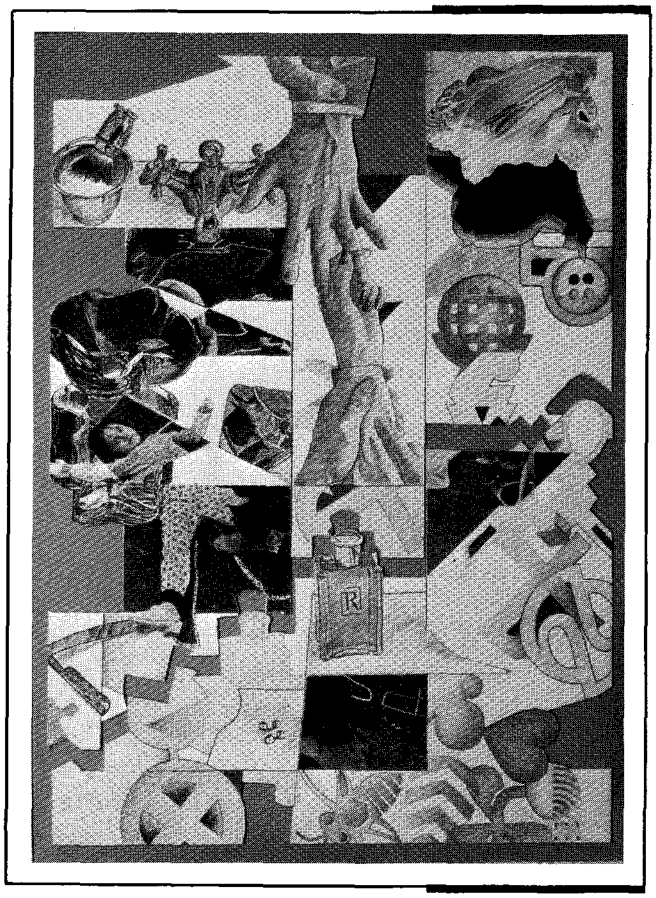
By the end of the year, Paula decided to move in with her mother. Emily loved having grandchildren underfoot. There was more than enough money (the store income, Mal's life insurance, etc.); but Paula got a job anyway and donated her salary to thorough lawn upkeep. A gifted semi-retired gardener consistently pleased the pampered lawn's demands with consumate ease and loving instinct. But no one could solve the dilemma at the far corner of the property. The spot where Mal had landed, bled, and expired became grayer and blacker each month until it was a bare and sterile ugly hole. Predictable gossip was Mal would have just hated that cruel sore. Sharp-eyed Paula knew better, had seen better, and therefore cautioned the gardener to leave that area alone. More than once Paula had seen dogs, cats, and children venture toward the lawn only to be violently jarred away. The children, knowing better than to cry out, just fled; the dogs escaped stiff-legged on their fright and flight pattern.

The hippie still walked his dog without a leash, but he now carried a shovel to scoop away his ward's debris. Paula got a raise and threw that, too, back into the lawn's absolute perfection. Emily was never happier—cooking for noisy children again and not ever being troubled by Mal.

No one had moved into the house across the street. It was like a stupid toy no one would claim. It just rotted there and even seemed to be sinking. Paula's kids grew like healthy flowers. The kid from Jersey sold his killer car and purchased a domesticated Chevy and stopped coming around. The hole never got much bigger after the first year and people, being people, accepted it as a peculiar beauty mark and historical spot and that was that. ☐

SODA POP

F. D. REEVE



On the corner of Greenwich Street and B——— there stands a dockside bar filled with old furniture and green, hanging plants. For years, it has drawn actors and artists from both sides of Houston and is called, who knows why, The Oasis: There's plenty of water all around.

Henry Baldwin stands six-four and weighs two hundred. Tommy the bartender knows that he teaches philosophy at a community college in Richmond. He lives near the bar and rides the ferry across the harbor every day. Back in the days of Bailey and the shape-up, when Harry Bridges ran the West Coast, he worked the North River docks.

"I met a rich woman the other day," says Henry. "Tell me, Tom, is it better to be rich?"

"It spices the sauce," says Tommy.

"Speaking of spice, I got a letter from Nora."

Tommy shakes his balding, reddish head. "I remember they lived up on Fourteenth Street in one of the hotels, Jack and Nora," says Tommy and yanks a beer-pull. "Pretty, little, dark-haired woman. You lost your head over her."

Henry takes a swipe and says, "They got married to save on income tax, and Jack a Socialist!"

"No Socialists left," Tommy says.

Henry swallows half his whisky. Light shimmers on his bushy salt-and-pepper beard. He glances at reflections in the bar mirror. "She was one of those pale Irish girls get their black hair from the gypsies. She was proud of her hips, too, was a real woman, but she never put herself forward."

"She did for you," Tommy says, raising his eyebrows.

Henry spins this way and that on his stool. "I used to go to church with her," he says, "when they still had the Latin. I remember her skin smelled like moss."

"It was like that with Jo and me," says Tommy, rinsing glasses, "but after you have kids you forget."

Henry smiles. "Hey," he says as he pushes his empty glass forward, "fuel the old liftener-stiffener. Yours, too."

"Mine runs on beer," says Tommy.

To the left, in the mural on the side wall, the Hudson River splits and shivers as it roars around Manhattan like two great gray arms. In each district of the island an ethnic face pops from among buildings like a Jack-in-the-Box.

"I first met them sitting in a bar after work, men at the other tables, him and her alone, her staring at him as one cat stares at another, not moving, then at some message or some secret between them, blinking and turning away. 'Hey there, you lovebirds,' I said, 'mind if a working stiff drinks with you?' Jack never drank or smoked. Only soda or coffee. That's the way he talked, too."

The lacquered stools, the oiled wood bar, the brass lights and trim, even the spider plants and the ferns seemed to hold their places without mistake. As Tommy has often said, the winds of change don't blow through The Oasis.

"One time you thought her the most beautiful woman in the world," Tommy reminds Henry.

"Of the brunettes," Henry says. They laugh. Then he says, "She sold books. She was smart. She'd quote Yeats or Moore or see if I could name the streets in *Dubliners*. She came from a Catholic college out in Oregon, had a lovely, high voice, you know, a light soprano, used to sing 'Weeping Mary' and 'Fair and Tender Ladies.'"

Tommy nods and keeps tidying up. "I've always liked singing."

As the sunlight faded in purples and grays beyond the river, behind tall brick apartments and, on the far side, piers and warehouses, Tommy switched on the several hanging lamps. The plant leaves turned lavender in the yellow light. The few customers there—most people came after dinner, made a night of it—sat separately, nursing their drinks. Everyone blinked at the sudden light.

"One Sunday walking back from church, she said she was free, would I care to go some place? She said Jack had a Socialist meeting, wouldn't be home until supper. That was the beginning."

"That's how Jo and me fell in love," says Tommy, "on a date like that, but what with kids and everything, you forget."

"The next morning Jack was working my pier," says

Henry. "For two weeks he had been on an extra gang on the dock, talking to the men, raising their consciousness, quote. He told them about labor laws and fair labor practices, the right to work and to enjoy the fruits of their labor. He even told them about the great commune on the other side of the world, hundreds and thousands of men working together for the common good.

"'Jesus, Jack,' I said to him, 'you want to watch that bullshit.'"

"'The entire supersturcture must collapse to allow development of the correct relationship between the worker and the means of production,' he said. He meant well, but he really talked like that.

"'Look at that superstructure,' said I, pointing to the roof of the pier while the forklifts zigzagged around us. 'When will that collapse?'

"Jack laughed. He always laughed louder than he should have, afraid he wasn't getting across. He believed that telling a joke was the way to make friends. 'You didn't see Nora yesterday, did you?' he asked.

"'No, where?' I lied.

"'I had a meeting was cancelled,' he said, 'and when I got home, she wasn't there.'

"'I was in church,' I said.

"'That's what she said,' he said. 'You didn't see her?'

"'I didn't see her, Jack.'

"'She said she saw you.'

"'Maybe at a distance,' I suggested, committed to my lie but pleased that he didn't believe it and ready to take him on man-to-man.

"'Maybe,' he said.

"The men were beginning to go in. 'Let's grab a beer at lunch,' I said.

"'Soda for me,' he said. 'She said you went to Coney Island.'

"Knowing we hadn't done that but not knowing what Nora had told him, I didn't know how far to go. 'That was last week,' I lied. 'Remember, we told you all about it?' The men were almost in, 'Hey, catch you for lunch!' I called out and ran off to join my gang going into the hold."

"Into Hell," says Tommy.

"But he had already turned away. As I walked in, I tried to figure out if she had really said Coney Island, or if he had made it up as a trap." Henry turns his glass. "We were off-loading coffee beans, hundred-thirty-five pound sacks. On a regular coffee ship we walked the sacks out, but this one was decked—five or six decks of beans on top of a couple of decks of hides. We used slings. After we cleared the first rows, it took us a time to haul the sacks from the corners, throw the goddamn sacks in the slings without ripping them with our long hooks. A sack would rip and the beans would spill to the bottom as noisily as a shower of gold. You know, the way Zeus came to Danae. That's a brand of coffee, Mountain Gold. If one of the company checkers heard it, he'd be on our ass in no time."

A young couple comes in, sits down at the bar. Tommy goes to serve them, comes back, picks up his cigarette. Henry watches the harbor lights come on, notices the evening star in the West.

"Jack never showed for lunch. All day we kept filling the slings, but whoever was working the winches must have got loaded, because they came flying in, sashaying from side to side like falling leaves, swinging their hips. And they'd go up doing a belly dance, all bumps and grinds, slapping one deck, then another, knocking off a bag here, a bag there. And it was that very morning I had heard Jack piling it onto somebody that dock work was skilled labor, very dangerous!"

"Took himself too seriously," Tommy says and winks and reaches to refill Henry's glass.

"The slings did their fandangos and hornpipes up and down," says Henry. "The eight of us in the hold were pretty good. Our four was fast—Moose and Paddy and Tim and me. Moose was telling stories and ribbing Pete. Moose was American, Pete was Slavish—Ukrainian, I think. Moose was making him out a Commie, which he no more was than your mother."

After handing Henry the drink, Tommy inhales a puff of his cigarette and shakes his head. Tommy is a first-rate listener.

"And Pete was making Moose out a Capitalist. They were pushing and horsing around. It was the end of the day. Hot. Between slings we were taking it easy. I began walking around to catch a breeze—

"'Slim, look out!'

"'Jump, boy!'

"'Get back!'

"'Catch him, Pete!'

"A weight hit me—a great stone, it might be, like the ones Ajax or Aeneas threw, the kind it would take two men nowadays to lift—hit me in the back of the legs, below the knees, and I began to fold. As I folded, I went forward. I reached out to block—there was nothing. I saw across the other side where the decking continued abaft the bulkhead. I looked down, my sight curving down as my body pitched forward—it takes a while to describe it, but it happened in less than a second; the images rushed past my eyes as if screened on the wind—and the last thing I saw clearly, as distinctly as I see your face before me, was the hides and, all the way down, the steel plates over the keel and the strakes, the very bottom of the ship a hundred feet below."

"You never told me," says Tom, partly awed. "You never did."

"The next I remember, I was staring back at the deck we were working on. The others were lined up like a football team. Half the sacks in the sling were lying on our deck, the rest hanging over, and I was holding on an arm's length below the hook, my foot caught in the netting. Pete and Tim had hands on me, pulling, and the others crowded closer to haul me in. I didn't think they could, me being heavy and over the edge like that, but they did."

"What had you done, grabbed behind?"

"Sort of sat down on it, knocked by the blow, and grabbed hold. Swung out and back like a pendulum. They fished me from the deep, they did. Netted Jonah instead of the whale."

"Jack was right," Tommy taunts. "It was dangerous work."

"That letter from Nora brought it back," says Henry.

"Now that it's over, though, what difference does it make? That's the question: Why bother?"

"You get married and settle down," says Tommy, "like Jo and me, you forget what it's like for you bachelors."

"No women on the docks," says Henry, "save the nuns that came begging on payday with their Quaker Oats cylinders and straw bread baskets, the leeches."

In the pause that follows, Tom checks the other customers. Outside it is nearly dark.

"So, I walked into this bar that Jack would take Nora to. She'd drink even if he wouldn't. She had a whisky in front of her, and he was playing with a coffee cup, socializing it, probably. I walked up behind them and said in a very low voice, 'Jack, you got to stop somewhere. Everybody'll have so much vacation there'll be nobody left to unload the coffee.' He stiffened, gasped. You might have thought I stabbed him. When he looked around, his eyes were popped and his mouth was open, as if he were seeing a ghost, or a body come out of the grave. Nora smiled, blushed, then backed off, scared by Jack's fear. I remember that for an instant I felt like Houdini coming up from underwater. I didn't know whether he'd suddenly throw his hook into me or pull a knife, so, keeping my eye on him all the time, I pulled out a chair on the other side of the table and sat down, all the while telling Jack he'd never organize the docks, they were a bunch of bozos and Bailey already had them. And I said how glad I was to see Nora because it had been at least a week and would he care to discuss where I had been yesterday.

"It wasn't Jack's expression that got me," says Henry, "it was Nora's. I had never seen such hopeless outrage. I told my story—half the sacks on the deck, half hanging over in the sling, me with my boot twisted into the netting and holding tight below the hook; how they hauled me in, the way Portuguese fishermen haul in a tuna. Nora's eyes narrowed; her fingers clenched and unclenched her glass. I wasn't so much playing to her as getting Jack out of the way. She wasn't his wife; she was his tax break."

"Why didn't she leave him?" Tommy interposes.

"A moment later she left us both," Henry says. "She got up, as bitter and angry as I've ever seen a woman, walloped Jack across the face as if trying to send him to center field. Knocked him half off his chair, bowled over his cup, saucer and spoon.

"'Working the winch, weren't you?' I said to Jack. 'Thought you'd get me, hunh? Where were you at lunch?'

"He protested, of course, but his eyes gave him away, the eyes of a coward. He had meant to do it.

"'You want to fight?' I yelled. 'Come on out and fight.'

"Of course he didn't. Mumbled about dangerous work, accidents. That's when she hit him. Rose up, like out of the sea, and walloped him. His trouble was he never took the responsibility.

"'You bastard!' she screamed. Something like that. 'You old fart.' That's what she said. 'You old fart.' In front of the men. Same as cutting off his balls." Henry shakes his head. "Then she ran out. I ran after her, but by the way she looked I didn't think she wanted anything to do with any man—and second thoughts are ninety-nine times out of a hundred better than first; so, I stopped for a second thought. Above all, I didn't want to give her away."

"And?"

Henry set his glass down without a sound. "I thought Jack was going to say it was a mistake, he got on the deck by mistake, they wouldn't let him off. Then he'd get up and go after her, try to make up. But you know what?"

"What?"

"As soon as what Nora had said sunk in—because at first nobody was paying attention—and they saw old Jack, not yet thirty but looking fifty, stiff and solemn, sitting where he had picked his ass up off the floor, they began laughing, the men. First, one or two; then a half dozen; then it spread, like a wave rolling in along a beach. They laughed and laughed. I wouldn't have been surprised if they had tossed him in a blanket. Sharp as nettles, the laughter stung every limb.

"He got to his feet like a lamb, the laughter bouncing off the walls, reverberating in our ears. Some men slapped my back; one kicked my ass; some cheered in mockery, as if I were managing a bum prizefighter.

"'Get it up, Jackie boy! Hold it out! Let's see whatcha got! Don't let 'em get it!' they shouted. 'Where you hiding it? Sling it, boy! Sling it up! Over the shoulder! Let's see what you've got." They laughed and shouted. 'He ain't got nothing, that's what.' 'Old fart,' she said. 'Shit, he drinks soda.' Some one yelled in his face and gave him the raspberry, 'Soda pop!'

"Like a chorus, then, they took it up: 'Soda pop, soda pop, soda pop, soda pop, soda pop!' I hear it now. Dumping on him. Letting go. Pouring out all their frustrations. They went wild."

"And he, did he understand it?"

"I had known all along what the men thought of him, but he was doing no harm. I hadn't the heart to tell him."

"I wouldn't have," says Tommy.

"See, the thing was," Henry begins, pauses, draws his hand across his face, "my mistake was not keeping up with her. She wanted to stay. There she was, and I didn't believe it."

"You get scared when you're young," says Tommy. "Seems a lot of responsibility, like you said."

"Nah," says Henry, "what the hell kind of responsibility was that jackass Jack? I should have gone west with her. Or some place. That was my mistake. That was a real chance," he says wistfully, "but when it came I let it go." He pauses a moment, finishes his drink. "What's that about simple words?

'When I say what things are like
Everyone's heart must be torn to shreds.
That you'll go down if you don't stand up for yourself
Surely you see that.'

Right?"

"Right on," says Tommy.

Henry and Tommy will meet soon again. The Oasis draws steady custom. The evening star rises regularly in the West. But Nora's letter lies heavy in Henry's pocket.

"You think we ever get a second chance, Tom?" Henry asks.

"Don't know," says Tommy, then smiles. "What did the letter say?" ☐

Manfred Jendryschik was born in 1943 in Dessau, East Germany, studied at the University of Rostock from 1962 to 1967, and since then has been associated with the Mitteldeutsche Verlag, Halle-Leipzig. He is the author of eight books of stories and non-fiction prose, and has edited three short fiction anthologies. The three poems below are from his poetry collection, Die Ebene, *published in 1980.*

MANFRED JENDRYSCHIK

THREE POEMS

MOMENT IN PETZOW

The shoulders feel the wall, in the light, sprinkled
with crumbling mortar, masonry behind, I think, the wind is
August, under the trees I hear laughter, my son.
I see him every two months, the divorced child,
three four days, more and more he grows different from me, I
    have to understand that, who ever
understands what becomes clear, we should take
a boat, even if it is very crude, the direction
is given by the oar, that much I know, the eddies
the doldrums the current, I'm over thirty, have experienced
    everything
two women are too much for one man, one life
is enough, one country, shriveling trust, I see
with my eyes closed, pink from the sun. From yonder lawn
comes his noise, which deep in my chest brings complete
    peace.   I read
with unmoving eye, at noon, about Magadan thirty-eight
in R.'s book, yet unpublished (the expert opinion), when she
heard of her husband's death she was blind for one day;

with unmoving eye she sees, what the departing
want, we, who knows, I have experienced nothing. A
revolution
left alone ages too fast, says my friend. I cling to
these years like the slowly rotting fruits
in boxes, to this son, to the wall, I try to bend my neck
so that warmth touches the skin under my shirt
the backbone, the ribs, the stones breathe
with shallow regularity, I feel it, the sun renders my face
very naked. Sweat makes the pores salty, intense as
sudden
hope, I walk among workers who decide
their own fate, in their throats is more than beer, porridge
they have cut the cloth of the flag, the sentences,
they shape the time and time shapes them, things long
thought out, the unexperienced, I hear myself think
my son
gnashing his teeth at night, with my mouth open, life
is such, in front of the house his brawling. He will perhaps
awaken the fences. His voice becomes stronger, say the text
books
the lungs, the heart, or they'll explode one day
he is nine, it's quiet (as stated before). I am smoking; I
am sweating. I feel rather happy. I will
probably while away the time.
Death is familiar, cannot be imagined. Unimaginable how
I meet death.
Yes, the aroma of the smoked fish fills
the air; it reminds me of a city. On the lake a sail.
I think of the lovely woman's triangle. We rear up
sometimes. Already into the years that will come.
Or into the near future. Or into our own fraud which
mandates a total effort, e.g. observations/warning signals
that the wheels stand still, before the emission control
cars circle
Buna, they measure the acid rain, we work eagerly
toward the end, I forget it, by the plant exit lush
flowers grow in the pond, an outgrowth,
Marcuse about *The Manuscripts* (by Marx), his
concentration
derives its glow from them, thoughts break away
through thoughts, unsupported, no passport at hand, I
don't hear my son, my ears ring, he's probably in
the back yard, then here, he asks how I feel, nothing, I say
this is much, I notice his hands, his shoulders,
the body's bone structure, the neck, I support the wall

FOR WILLIAM C. WILLIAMS

The table the chair the bed the shelf
the window small the herd of flowers
and the lamp lightning in August
all this is ready for you Mr. Williams
the nail in the wall for your hat
(the picture close by someone made himself
for us) the water glass and whiskey
bread the knife cigarettes too
the door ajar for the wind of curiosity:

here are four walls which I can give:
with table chair bed and you next door
the other room I need myself to live

THE NEW APARTMENT

Here the cupboards will be. There the books. The
pots, knives, forks, etc., the gentle brigade of greeneries.
Above the bed the almost forgotten prints,
the lamps. Table and chair as always. And the glass:
once, I know, I'll be in the mirror and my
picture turning slowly in the hallway

Here I will settle down, I'm prepared.
Here I will fit the years to my condition, fit into the years
I have waited for this moment a long time, for
this ease. I will be satisfied with myself just as those
who were my enemies

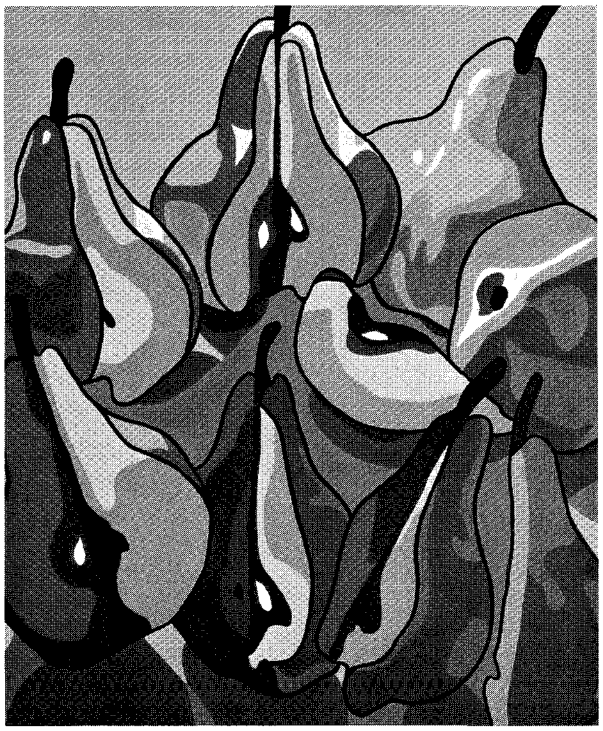
Sometimes utopia startles me. But: even if
Luther compared to Müntzer was a ridiculous
stick-in-the-mud, he knew how to cook a capon
how to bake and how to gorge himself. In the
market they sell Portuguese wine

Here some day I will unload, the lamp post
in the divided view. Perhaps then a mumbling will
be heard from me, something like More Light. Nothing's impossible

In front of the door the street the city the countryside
In the yard we will load kegs of beer, fermenting breath
In the evening children carry Chinese lanterns; their believing eyes

Translated, from the German, by F.H. König

PEARS



JANET DESAULNIERS

In New Orleans, in the Quarter, there is a crab bar, a tiny sidewalk restaurant tucked between two hotels, called The House of Desire. The first time I saw it, I was twenty-one and somehow jarred to think that such a small cafe would carry a name like that, even in the Quarter with its strip show barkers and narrow doorways that open into a pink wavering light. I asked my waitress if the intended pronunciation was The House of Désirée, imagining a French or Cajun owner. The waitress was a stolid girl, a Southerner, with big feet and hands, and I think she deliberately prolonged her drawl when she answered.

"It's desire," she said. It sounded beautiful when she said it. Her voice seemed heavy with sea smells and low music. At once I thought both she and the little restaurant were very brave.

I am like most people. I don't talk about desire. I think this has something to do with a certain confusion about my body, a lack of control. Once I told a friend: "The only thing that matters is monogamy of the mind. The body is unimportant. It may be ignored, coddled, tossed from bed to bed. Doesn't matter. One does what one must do." A young woman, of course, admires conclusions.

Now I sense that I have underestimated the body's importance: I see that people care about the bodies of others. People are particular, even fastidious. There are rules. For example, I have learned that the body should be held just so. The men who sprawl across sofas at cocktail parties and the women who gesture broadly in restaurants cause others to lean far back into the secret space between their shoulders. Not that the body should be retiring. There is, I think, a general disdain for those who button their shirts to the collar. In short, the body should be sensible. It should be confident enough to take the center of any room, polite enough to hold attention no longer than a moment.

My body is sensible: thin, but not too thin, not fashionably so. My thighs have spread to save me from fanaticism. My legs and arms are very long, almost lithe, but most of the time I keep them pulled close, elbows punching my ribs, knees always together. Sometimes though, for a reason I don't quite understand, my body rebels, and I get into trouble.

At seven, I was a dancer. Five days a week, I forced my body through three hours of imposed revelry. All the time, I was afraid for myself. I had to be pulled from the floor where I sat folded up like a wallet, and pushed to the stage. I was terrified my body might break apart. I danced haltingly, waiting always for a sound like the snap of a fresh bean. Later, long after I stopped dancing, I watched myself grow. I was still afraid. At night, with the palms of my hands, I pressed back against the force that pushed from somewhere beneath my breasts. I dressed carefully, using only the tips of my fingers. Then, when my body seemed to have finished growing, when I felt sure that this was the body I would finally have, a change occurred. The wools of my sweaters and skirts suddenly seemed too heavy for my shoulders and hips. My thighs broke out in a rash. Each afternoon, in a tee-shirt and pink shorts, I would run around the duck pond at the park near my house. Women sitting in a garden of pastels watched me and pulled their arms tight around their thin waists as if trying to hold themselves inside their dresses. Later I tied scarfs around my neck and through my hair. I began sleeping nude. I was sixteen and very proud. The curve that started at my hip and shaped my thigh seemed perfect—breathtaking.

Now, ten years later, there are random days when my body, tender with the world, stretches and pulls with yearning, days I want to move through crowds. Once on the bus after a trip to the market my bag split, and four pears rolled clumsily down the aisle. On most days I would have cringed at the prospect of exposing the angles of my legs and hips and shoulders to others. But it was a day when dropping pears was welcome. My body felt magnanimous and kind. Dropping the pears offered a chance to be gentle with my hands and voice, to whisper "excuse me" in just the right tone, to nudge an ankle aside with exact tenderness. My last pear had lodged near the rear exit. The other riders by this time were smiling small kind smiles. We were all enjoying a moment of quiet and warmth. I was pleased by that. I moved gracefully down the aisle. I felt young and happy. As I bent to reach the last pear, a man crouched down beside me. He held his hands in the air just inches from my waist as if in silent assurance that I would not fall. Just before I stood up, he ran his hand along the back of my calf. It was summer and I wore no stockings. His hand was smooth and light as water against my skin. When I turned, we looked warmly into each other's faces the way lovers do after a very long argument. We were grateful and tired. Both of us straightened and lurched as the bus stopped. He got off, the others shifted in their seats, and I sat down with my pears.

So, in a certain mood, I break rules. My body gets away from me, throws off caution, takes charge. This happened when I was twenty-three.

I was in love with a quiet good man. His name was Michael, and he was much older than I, but not so much older as to be extraordinary. Not old enough to break any rules. He was serious, sometimes almost sad, about life. Though he was a musician, a saxophone player, and though the warm smoky music suited him, it did not secure him the solace I always thought musicians found. His was an eerie sound. His power pushed up from somewhere deep inside him though he was a very small, thin man who simply didn't seem to possess mass enough to produce a sound like that. His music was beautiful though, frighteningly so. Listening to him play was like waking up alone from a bad dream to know that it was the tenth bad dream in ten nights alone, and then to hear, as if from the farthest corner of the room, the sound of someone turning and breathing in a deep contented sleep. It was a startling kind of comfort. I'm not sure he knew he offered it because, as I said, he was often sad and quiet.

I, on the other hand, was young. I believed that I gave Michael energy and he gave me calm. I remember once I came home breathless after passing a small gallery near our house. He was sitting near the window, where he always sat, practicing. He stopped when he heard the key in the door. I rushed in, threw my packages on the couch, and said, "The windows are full of winged mules." He was already beginning to smile when he leaned forward to watch my face.

"What?"

"At the gallery. Tiny baroque mules." I began to pace and wave my arms as if trying to stir up the quiet air. "They're on goblets, punchbowls. Some are just hanging from wires, floating. Pink, yellow, green. They're all colors."

"Mules?"

"Yes," I sat down heavily and learned far back into the chair, grinning. "Mules."

He smiled back at me and then we had dinner. The next evening there was a blue winged mule poised on the brim of my coffee cup. I held it in the palm of my hand and imagined Michael setting his saxophone aside, tearing one check from the packet he kept in the drawer by the bed, and walking down the street. I imagined him hurrying, perhaps even crossing against the light. I still have the mule, and sometimes I try to hold it in my hand in the precise way I held it that evening.

Michael and I were very good together. We shared a house and a bed. This is my way of saying we were lovers though I realize it is a rather vague way of saying it. In old movies, the audience could look at trees or clouds, sometimes even the moon, if the director wanted to imply that two people had become lovers. I have always thought that was a rather gentle notion, but still, it is imprecise. One can never be sure the audience will think of desire. They might think simply of the pink edge around the moon or of how the crown of buds on the trees resembles a new spring hat. There is no sure way of talking about desire. I suppose I could say that we sweated and moaned together even on winter nights, but somehow that sounds either pornographic or very funny. We were neither. In my own mind, I usually think, "In addition to loving me, he gave my body pleasure." But that too is vague and wasn't always true. Some nights my body was almost rigid in its defiance. Michael would try first to soothe me, then leave me alone, then soothe me again. Nothing worked. My body was vacant and invisible. I felt neither his absence nor his touch. There were moments I thought his hands went through me to the tangled bedsheets. For a long time, I didn't understand that, but I accepted it. I live with it even now like a door that never closes completely.

One thing is sure, though—I loved a quiet good man. Then very suddenly, on a day like the pear-dropping day, I walked to another man's house, a man I'd seen movies with, entertained over elaborate dinners, a man who had been my friend for three years. I had one drink. I patted his dog. I talked about sports and good restaurants. Then as he reached across the table to fill my glass, I touched his arm, which was strong and pale. Perhaps I touched him because everything between us had always been so clean, so finely edged, or perhaps I just wanted to comfort him, even congratulate him, for having a pale, strong arm in such harsh morning light. Naturally, breaking a rule like that made a mess of things, but for a moment, it was a warm, human kind of mess, like the passion that turns over tables and litters carpets.

When I went home, Michael was there, his saxophone leaned neatly, perfectly, against the sill. He said, "Where have you been?" and I said, "I've been to John's house. I've just slept with him. In the last hour."

He cried for some time, his face turned to the window. Every few seconds, his hands picked at his shirt as though his chest and arms ached. I didn't try to touch him though my mind screamed at me to hurry, to comfort him before he slipped away. My body was blankly defiant.

Twisting in his chair, Michael smoothed his shirt and looked at me. His face was soft and shaken. I thought then that I wanted him to understand, though now I see that such a thing was impossible, and I probably knew it. If I didn't know it, I should have. It's a rule. I could only sit and watch him cry. □

THE PRESENT CASE

Bang, Bang You're Dead

Humans are the last plentiful big game. You have to be filthy rich, or else live near one of earth's vanishing wild places, to get a shot at grizzlies or tigers or rhinos. But there are people for the killing everywhere you look. You can take your pick of victims—both sexes, all ages, any color of skin, any creed. Choose vicious ones, armed to the teeth, if you have a taste for danger; or pussycat gentle ones, if you prefer not to risk your own neck. In addition to the old-fashioned guns and knives and lengths of pipe, there are dozens of jazzy new weapons available, from lightning-quick poisons to lasers, not to mention bombs, bombs the size of a wallet and bombs fat enough to put a wobble in our orbit. No license is required, although it helps to wear the uniform of an army or the get-up of a guerrilla band. And there is no limit to the number of victims per hunter.

It's hard to escape the feeling, under the barrage of the day's news, that we've declared open season on our own kind. Coups and invasions, border wars and civil wars; execution gangs scouring the countryside, snipers crouched in tenements; explosives delivered by jet and car and parcel post; firing squads and electric chairs; plain old murder in our cities' mean streets: you know the sort of news I mean. We hear so much of it, we forget how odd it is, this epidemic of killing. Chewing on these reports of mayhem with our breakfast cereal, swallowing a bit of the bitterness every day, we gradually stop tasting it. Then a really sour slice of news lands on our plate—depending on the year, the word might come from Auschwitz or Johannesburg, from My Lai or Beirut, from Moscow or New York—and suddenly we gag. Not that, we say, stomach turning. Lord, lord, not *that.* And for a spell we are baffled by the bloodthirstiness of our species. We are astonished and grieved.

When this aching amazement came over me recently, I couldn't help noticing that all the killers—the heroes wrapped in flags and goons wrapped in straitjackets—are male, and I couldn't help seeing in their murderousness a grown-up version of the violent games we played back in boyhood.

Take the schoolyard, for instance. It was an acre of gravel and grass and weeds, bordered on one side by a farmer's electric cow fence, on the other two sides by the chain-link and barbed wire of a government munitions depot. This was in the country, in Ohio. Behind the farmer's boundary a lumbering bull patrolled, and behind the government's fence cruised guards in olive-drab Chevrolets. At every recess, dividing into tribes, we fought bitterly over that scuffed territory. Within each tribe there was a punching order, from the meanest big lugs down to the scrawniest wimps. The chief bully would bruise the runner-up, and the runner-up would shove the next in line, and so the punishment would cascade down. In nature films I have seen exactly the same thing happen among baboons: the alpha male starts a chain of growling and pushing that passes down through the ranks like a shock wave through a line of railroad cars, and when it reaches the end, the puniest baboon, with no other beast to belt, gives a kick at the sand.

Unlike the female baboons, however, which take their lumps and give their lumps right along with the males, the girls rarely took part in our schoolyard bullying. Occasionally a tough sweetie would wallop the daylights out of a pestering boy. "If you don't shut up," she'd cry, "I'll put out your lights! I'll chop you up for stew! I'll move that ugly nose to the back of your head!" And she would bloody the lout. But most of the time the girls stood aside from our battles, mocking us, faces like bread dough stretched into smiles, murmuring mysteriously, or they rode the swings with bare legs thrust skyward. I always envied them for that aloofness. I still do. To my ignorant eyes they seemed more sensible than we boys were, so contained, more confident of who they were and where they stood in the scale of things.

Nor did the girls play with guns. Now and again they would wear fringed skirts or cowboy hats, but they never strapped holsters on their hips, never carried plastic grenades in their lunch buckets, never hid wooden machine guns behind the coal chute for battlefield use during recess. We boys played with all those weapons, and more: model tanks, bombers, howitzers, bazookas; rubber knives secreted in our hip pockets, pistols thrust under our belts. Our bedrooms were arsenals. The halls of our houses were awash with imaginary gore. The westerns and war movies that crammed the television after school showed us how it was done, this gleeful killing.

When I was in kindergarten, during the Korean War, you could buy plastic soldiers in the dime store, their bodies molded into fighting position, their chests criss-crossed with ammo belts, their waists bejeweled with grenades. Of course the girls would have nothing to do with them, those mysterious girls, but all the boys played war on the dusty floors of bedrooms and in the dirt of backyards for hours on end, slaughtering Chinese, Japanese, Russians, Germans. I don't think we imagined actual people dying in our blustery assaults—we were too young to know anything about death—but we understood with utmost clarity that the world was divided, as in westerns and GI-sagas, into good guys and bad guys. Our side deserved to live, and the other side to perish. The notion of the perfectly evil enemy hung in our minds like a blank target, waiting for a name to be written across it.

When our own son turned three and got the itch for guns, my wife and I said no. Why not? he wanted to know. Because it isn't healthy, we'd say lamely; it isn't good for you or for the world. How could we recount for him what we had learned about real cowboys and Indians, about war, about genocide and assassination and the extinction of animals? How could we explain to three-year-old Jesse the sense of betrayal we felt upon discovering that we were condemned to live our adult lives under the tyranny of the trigger?

Unconvinced, Jesse would halt in the aisles of department stores and gaze longingly at water-pistols, like a starving bum in a bakery. In the library he would thumb his way through picture-books, and when he found soldiers or spacemen, he would show them to us triumphantly, as proof that every boy is entitled to bear arms. But we stood firm. No guns. Most of his friends' parents—peacenik holdovers from the Vietnam era like ourselves—also prohibited weapons. No cowboy shoot-em-ups on TV, we declared; no war movies, no cop shows. But here and there a grandparent delivered a six-shooter for Christmas, or an older schoolmate passed along a snapping rifle, or a magazine ad for the Army inspired a yearning for tanks, and suddenly the boys were blasting one another with every pointed object they could find, from rulers to fingers. One day at lunch, still frustrated in his desire for an honest-to-goodness gun, Jesse nibbled his peanut butter sandwich into the shape of a revolver and sprayed us all with bullets.

The mayhem in Vietnam threw toy soldiers and their weapons into stinking disfavor, and for a while they disappeared from the stores. The manufacturers switched over to coochy-coo farm animals and road gangs. But as the gruesome images from Asia have faded, the business in war toys has begun to flourish once again. Now my son is in kindergarten, and all of his buddies keep an army or two in their closets. "What kinds of stuff do they have?" I ask him. "All kinds," he says warily, watching my eyes to see if I'll get on my high horse. "Like what?" Reassured because I have not growled at him, Jesse bursts into an excited inventory of the GI Joe set, the Star Wars fleets, the Masters of the Universe. "You ought to see them," he concludes passionately, "they're really neat."

This seems like good advice for a behind-the-times dad, so I leave an hour early on my daily run to pick up kids at school and pay a visit to one of the local toy emporiums. Infant amusements are heaped near the door, bright-colored beads and ticking rabbits and jovial pythons. Farther in, the store is divided by sex, girl things to the left, all in soothing pastels, boy things to the right, in lurid shades of flame and bruise and midnight. I make a quick leftward sweep to see what the mysterious females are up to, passing colonies of dolls, meadows of needlework kits, households of dishes and miniature vacuum cleaners. I am stopped in my tracks by a box labeled "Gettin' Pretty," a "Beauty Guide & Cosmetic Boutique" for teaching young girls how to cultivate their charms and give themselves the "high fashion" look. The cutie pictured on the front appears to be about seven; smoothing her wrinkles, she conquers nature's blemishes just in the nick of time. Stunned to find such a relic from what I thought was the dead-and-gone past—as if, in browsing through the tool racks at a hardware store I had discovered a stone ax for sale—I turn this box over and over. A clerk bustles up and tells me that this is only the starter kit. For more advanced cosmetics, I should look farther down the aisle. I drop "Gettin' Pretty" and flee to the other side of the store.

It takes no searching to find the war toys, which occupy more than half of the boys' department. The display for GI Joe ("A Real American Hero") fills both sides of a long aisle all by itself. Unlike the old days before Vietnam put a damper on things, when there was only a single figure called GI Joe, now there are fifteen or so, with a dozen assault vehicles and an armory of battle gear, from jetpacks to cross-country skis. The machinery of destruction and the lingo of the packaging have also been modernized. No more stodgy jeeps and gimpy halftracks. Now you get to choose from mobile missiles, artillery lasers, polar snowscooters, jet-powered helicopters and other whizzbang equipment, all "based on the U.S. Army's top secret weapons system." (Even now the Soviets are most likely smuggling these gizmos back to Moscow and copying the designs.) Collect every machine, the boxes urge us, and use them "to help GI Joe protect democracy from the evil enemy army of COBRA command."

The armies of COBRA, naturally, are also for sale. The molded figures are sinister, their faces masked with goggles or visors or bandannas, their eyes mere slits. ("Why are their faces all covered up?" I ask my son later. "It makes them more scary," he says, "like they're machines, you know, and don't have any hearts in them.") Each of the GI Joe characters has a code name, usually a macho monosyllable such as Grunt, Clutch, Zap, or Hawk, but the COBRA soldiers are all lumped under the single code name of "The Enemy." Whereas every good guy is supplied with a capsule biography, all the bad guys are covered with a blanket description: "Each is chosen for his physical strength and total dedication to evil." No weak adversary here, and no moral complications. Forces of light and forces of darkness. ("Does COBRA sound like the name of any country?" I ask during my son's next playgroup. After a moment's thought, one boy shouts, "China!" and another, "Russia!")

Keeping up with the times, the GI Joe folks include one female figure in their congregation of warriors. At least some things have changed since the Korean War, I reflect hopefully; in the benighted old days, women served only as nurses and captives and booty. Then I flip the box over and discover that her code name is—what? Smack? Fang? No—it's Cover Girl. With that alias, she probably carries a supply of "Gettin' Pretty" cosmetics in her fieldpack. Formerly a high fashion model in New York and Chicago, now an efficient assassin, "Cover Girl finds that she must work against her beauty to prove herself. She's compelled to learn and master decidedly unfeminine disciplines. Her self-assurance and stunning good looks reduce most men to stuttering fools." Reading this account in the toy store aisle, I am reduced to a stuttering fool. I scan the passage again, to make sure I have not made this up. Sure enough, the words are there, describing the same old battlefield beauty, the nurse, the canteen dazzler, the sweetheart in uniform. If Grunt and Zap and the other tough guys have to put up with a female who is intent on proving herself in warfare, at least they can take comfort in her stunning good looks.

A boy of four or so, with a head of dandelion fluff, surprises me while I am clutching Cover Girl. "Look, Mommy," he exclaims, "they even got a lady in the army."

"Sure," the mother replies, "why shouldn't they?" She is carrying a baby on her hip, and wears the harassed look common to all parents who make the mistake of letting themselves be dragged by their children into toy stores. She gives me a suspicious glare. I hang Cover Girl back on the display rack.

"But I bet she doesn't carry a gun," says the boy.

"Of course she does," the mother insists. "Look at the picture."

The boy scrutinizes Cover Girl. "Yeah," he admits. "But she doesn't do any killing."

Exasperated, the mother snaps, "Don't be silly. Women are just as good at killing as men are," and as if to reinforce her point she yanks the complaining boy away by the arm.

In the next aisle I encounter the "Masters of the Universe." These are brawny lugs who are divided, like rival football teams, into groups of "Heroic Warriors" and "Evil Warriors" (labels that the manufacturer claims as trademarks, lest someone else should stumble upon these apt phrases). They are fantasy counterparts to GI Joe, the good guys bearing names such as He-Man ("Most Powerful Man in the Universe"), Man-at-Arms ("Master of Weapons"), and Zodac ("Cosmic Enforcer"); and the bad guys going by such titles as Skeletor ("Lord of Destruction") and Faker ("Evil Robot"). Swollen with muscles, none of the creatures looks particularly human; if you met one on a sidewalk, you would have to scramble into the street in order to squeeze by. One blunt fellow—the "Heroic Human Battering Ram"—appears in fact to be a solid lump of muscle, a sort of Platonic ideal of the weight lifter. But however meaty they may be, the heroes at least have humanoid faces, while the villains wear the faces of bugaboos from the late-late show.

The makers of these cosmic warriors show that they also are up with the times by including two women in their squadron, one for the forces of light, one for the forces of darkness. Like Cover Girl they are not only tough customers; they are also curvaceous charmers, doubtless capable of reducing the muscle-bound he-men to stuttering fools when the need arises. Rigged out in high-heeled boots, tiaras, and body suits that elevate their breasts and bare their haunchy hips, looking in fact like professional cheerleaders (who are dressed to look like hookers), these dangerous ladies are sorceresses who fight with magic instead of swords.

Beyond the Masters of the Universe I spy other galactic armies, battalion after battalion, with exotic weapons stacked in boxes to the ceiling, their names drawn from the most recent outerspace slam-bang movies. But my eyes are beginning to glaze over. I retreat from the aisles of bruise-and-flame-colored toys, past the "Screaming Eagles" combat set; past electronic machine guns and laser pistols; past falcon-faced missiles and alien bombers. After so many futuristic weapons, it is almost touching to glimpse, as I hurry out, a flintlock pistol with coonskin hat, a cowboy-and-Indian set called Fort Courage, and a Lone-Ranger outfit complete with six-shooter, mask, and silver bullets.

My son is intrigued, when I explain why I am a few minutes late in picking him up from kindergarten, to learn that I took his advice and went browsing among the war toys. Imagine that—old curmudgeonly Dad, who won't allow so much as a popgun into the house, out at the mall studying lasers and assassins. Jesse hopes for a miraculous conversion, for Dad to see the light and agree to arm the household.

"What do you think?" he asks cautiously.

"They're interesting," I answer vaguely.

"Did you like them?"

"I'm not sure."

"*I* think they're really *nifty*," he cries, his wariness overwhelmed by his enthusiasm, "especially GI Joe. Just about the neatest thing there is."

"What's so nifty about them?" I ask him.

"There's all the soldiers, bunches of them, and all the stuff that goes with them, the backpacks and skis. And vehicles! Every kind you can imagine."

"You could have the same stuff with campers or forest rangers. Why not a set of mountain climbers?"

"But GI Joe's got planes, you know, and rockets, and rifles and. . . ." He checks himself, mindful of the family taboo on guns. "And there's COBRA. You know—the enemy."

"Yeah, I saw them. Why are they enemies?"

"They just *are*. I don't know. They're bad. They're against GI Joe."

"So that makes it more fun, having an enemy?"

He shrugs. "It's the only way you can have a war."

We stop on our way home to buy milk at the supermarket. Waiting in the checkout line, I notice the headlines on one of the weekly scandal sheets: SECRET SAFARIS PREY ON POOR VILLAGERS. RICH HUNTERS KILL HUMANS FOR SPORT. FAT-CAT SPORTSMEN SHOOT CHILDREN LIKE RABBITS IN WILDS OF INDIA.

"What's that about?" says Jesse.

"Oh," I mutter, "just a story."

Unsatisfied, suspicious of a parental cover-up, he puts his brand new reading skills to use, stumbling over the bulky words. "Poor," he says. "Rich . . . fat . . . cat," and then he manages to sound out "shoot . . . children . . . like . . . rabbits." He repeats the phrase quizzically. "Shoot children like rabbits? What are they *talking* about?"

"It's just a made-up story," I assure him. Turn his attention elsewhere, I think. But there is nothing in sight except cigarettes, candy, horoscopes, and glamour magazines featuring scrawny models in unbuttoned dresses. As I pay for the milk, I grump at the cashier, "Why do you jam all this trash up here where we have to stand in line and look at it?" The clerk, a high school boy wearing a clown's polka-dot bowtie and a have-a-happy-day button, blinks at me in consternation.

In the parking lot I tell Jesse, "People think up silly things like that to sell papers and magazines. Nobody's hunting children, believe me." But I'm not so sure what to believe myself, and I suspect that Jesse has already planted this bit of news in the patch of his child's memory devoted to dread, another seed of nightmare.

We find our car flanked by two pickups, each with a rifle in the gun-rack of the cab window. Back when I worked as a carpenter in the Vietnam era, the builder I rode with carried a framing level on his rack. The other guys in our crew—bearded, ponytailed, lanky young galoots who talked politics and karma while they hammered—displayed umbrellas or walking-sticks in their trucks. But nowadays, here in southern Indiana, half the gun-racks I see are loaded.

Coming in the NAR:

Summer Fiction Issue

Stories by David Kranes, Joann Kobin, Hollis Giammatteo, Justine Buisson, Lucas Cooper, Adrienne Wolfert, Lee Merrill Byrd, Pamela Painter

Poems by Lynda K. Hull, Albert Goldbarth, Judith Root, Gary Margolis

Tourist attractions: Olympics in Los Angeles, a World's Fair in New Orleans

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"Why do they need those rifles?" Jesse asks, not for the first time. He can't understand why his mom and dad forbid him to own so much as a cap pistol when all these grown men are hauling arsenals around in their pickups.

I remember putting the same question to a fellow who was sharing a gas pump with me some time ago. While the two of us waited for our tanks to fill, I nodded at the rear window of his truck and asked, in a cordial way, why he carried three rifles. Just as cordially, he replied, "The twenty-two is for varmints, the twelve-gauge is for deer, and the thirty-aught-six is for people who mess with me." He had a fat, cherubic face, like an aging choir boy, and smiled as he spoke.

Not long after this gas station chat, when a man pulled up at a stop sign near our house, three boys hiding in the bushes peppered his truck with kernels of field corn, a traditional Halloween stunt. Instead of laughing, the man grabbed a shotgun from the rack behind his head and fired blindly into the bushes, putting two of the boys in hospital.

"They don't really *need* those guns," I tell Jesse, not for the first time. "It isn't as if they have to protect their lambs from mountain lions, or fight off highwaymen."

"I guess they just like having them up there to look at," says Jesse. "It kind of makes them feel good, you know. Like hanging pictures on the wall." As we drive home, he turns around several times, studying our rear window. I imagine he is wondering if you can buy gun racks for compact station wagons.

Wherever it comes from—genes or movies, phallic fixation or the breeze—this hankering for guns seems to be as potent in young boys as the hankering for sex will be later on. The trouble, of course, is that too many boys refuse to surrender their six-shooters when their beards grow in. They trade in the toys for the real thing.

A lawyer I know owns a collection of machine guns, for which he has secured a special license. He's a neighborly sort of guy, who carries jumper-cables in his trunk and helps folks start their cars on winter mornings. He looks in regularly on an eightyish man who lives alone next door. He raises herbs in a backyard garden and shares them up and down the street. "What do you want with machine guns?" I ask him. "They're a good investment," he claims. But every weekend he takes one of his gleaming investments to the firing range and burns up ammo worth more than any profit he's likely to make from selling his collection.

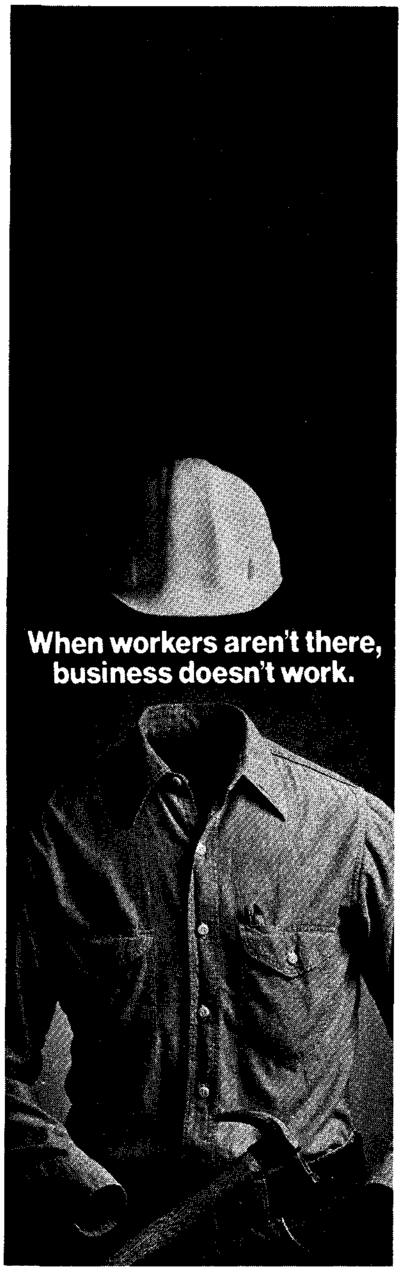
The firing range is crowded with shooters, and so is the countryside. Any day I'm feeling reckless I can take a hike in the hills south of town and hear gunfire, or I can watch marksmen blast floating junk in the abandoned limestone quarries. I find perforated cans squatting on stumps, and the shattered necks of bottles hanging by string from branches. On the ground, shell casings are scattered more thickly than hickory nuts. Here and there an abandoned car lies riddled and rusting in the ditch. Every road sign leaks daylight through bullet holes. It's as if private militias were constantly training in the woods.

There are sixty million or so handguns in our country, little packages of annihilation within arm's reach, about one for every four of us. Two or three million new ones are sold each year. You can get a license to manufacture them for fifty bucks, and for ten bucks you can get a license to sell them. Unlike rifles, which hunters use as an excuse for hiking in the woods, handguns are worthless for hunting and next to worthless for target shooting. About all they are good for is putting large holes in people at close range, and for that they are very good. In recent years, handguns have been used in killing some twenty-five thousand people a year in the U.S., including murders, suicides, and accidents. Knowing these numbers, when I am in crowds I don't worry about what other folks might pick from my pocket; I worry about what they might pluck from their own.

To judge from interviews on television, every third house or so has a basement stocked with two years' worth of food and a bedroom crammed with artillery. "We aim to survive," a grim-faced man announces to the camera. The barrels of guns, row upon row, gleam from the wall behind him. His son, a gap-toothed smiler about the age of Jesse, shows how to dismantle and reassemble a submachine gun. His wife holds up a jar of pickled beets for inspection. "Survive what?" the interviewer asks. "Everything," the father declares, flinging his arms wide, "the whole mess. When it all comes apart, we're going to sit right here and stay alive."

At the newsstand I discover *Survival* magazine, aimed at those who are larding their basements with pickled beets and submachine guns. I browse through other magazines with titles such as *Knife Journal* ("How to Start Your Sword Collection"), *Shooting, Safari* ("Bagging a Pronghorn Despite the Ban"), *American Hunter, American Rifleman, American Handgunner, Guns & Ammo* ("The Most Powerful Rifle in the World") and plain old *Guns.*

The most chilling selection at the newsstand is *Soldier of Fortune,* "The Journal for Professional Adventurers." When I buy a copy I ask the drowsy salesgirl to put it in a sack for me. This provokes a tilted smile from her. "Enjoy your reading," she says. From the cover, which shows U.S. Marines in battle gear landing on Grenada, through the articles about military hardware and bombing raids and Central American gun-running, to the classified ads for mercenaries and bounty hunters, the magazine is an exaltation of violence. It is a grown-up's version of GI Joe, complete with high-tech weapons, page after page of survival gear (bulletproof vests and $300 knives), big-


When workers aren't there, business doesn't work.

Each year cancer strikes 120,000 people in our work force, and causes our economy to lose more than $10 billion in earnings. Earnings that American workers might still be generating if they had known the simple facts on how to protect themselves from cancer.

Protect your employees, your company, and yourself. . .call your local unit of the American Cancer Society and ask for their free pamphlet, "Helping Your Employees to Protect Themselves Against Cancer." Start your company on a policy of good health today!

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY®

This space contributed as a public service.

bosomed ladies for distracting the troops and for selling products, and a division of the world between Heroic Warriors (U.S. soldiers and our client armies) and Evil Warriors (Soviet soldiers and *their* clients). The ads offer Nazi hats and kamikaze headbands, instructions for making napalm or for evading lie-detector tests, ballpoint pens that convert into stilettos, "Viet Cong Hunting Club" badges that show a guerrilla caught in the crosshairs of a gunsight, or human skulls pierced by 12″ daggers. "Genuine Human skull (not plastic) zapped by USMC combat knife," the ad promises. "Unique Bizarre trophy for your den or gunroom . . . mind-boggling!" The lily-livered pacifists, whose minds really do boggle at all this bloody-mindedness, are in fact (as one essay observes) "on the *other side*—they are fighting the war, just as surely as a left-wing lobbyist in Washington or a . . . guerrilla in the bush." The other side, of course, belongs to COBRA, Satan, the evil warriors, the Commies, the perennial brutes in black hats.

Mystified and more than a little scared by this civilian arms race, I stop by a local gun shop to see what's for sale. The downstairs is heaped with clothes. The weapons are on the second floor. At the top of the stairs a noose dangles down—"RESERVED FOR SHOPLIFTERS"—and on the wall beside it is a plaque inscribed with the second article of the Bill of Rights, guaranteeing us all the freedom to bear arms.

Except for some tents and fishing tackle, the whole of this second floor is devoted to helping us fulfill our constitutional privilege: there are enough crossbows, rifles, knives, revolvers, and shotguns to equip most of the able-bodied folks in town. It is a candy-store for gun-lovers, case after case of gleaming weapons. In the faces of men who are gazing at the wares, there is a child's or a lover's undisguised hunger. One man in a three-piece suit actually presses his nose to the glass, the better to study a selection of pistols. Another fellow, who has been handed a thirty-thirty for inspection, strokes the barrel and the satiny walnut stock with his eyes closed.

The stuffed heads of deer, bear, mountain goat and moose peer down solemnly from the walls, their glass eyes glinting. Lesser beasts are represented by entire carcasses, including a turkey, a mallard, and a swordfish. Skins of fox and raccoon hang from nails. All these moldering trophies remind me of the prize teddy bears at shooting-galleries. "Win one for your tootsie!" the barker would cry. "Five shots for a quarter!" Beside a shelf stacked with brochures from the National Rifle Association, a sheet of tin is on display, decorated with bullet holes that trace out the profile of an Indian in feathered headdress, and signed by one Tom Frye, Remington Arms Co., 1971. I sit for a while in a chair fashioned from a barrel and leaf through gun catalogs. The cover of the one for Winchester Sporting Arms shows John Wayne in cowboy get-up, his eyes fixed on the horizon, the air aswirl with smoke, and the sky blotted out by the Stars and Stripes.

At one end of this armory, set off by a split-rail fence and gate, there is a museum of hunting and military paraphernalia. The white-haired clerk who keeps watch nearby tells me, "Go right on in," and I thank him and do. Bayonets, mess-kits, medals, cartridge-belts, daggers, photographs of big game hunters kneeling beside deflated elephants and spread-eagled tigers: surrounded by these mementos of mayhem, I begin to feel the panicky smothering sensation that drove me from the toy store. Through a doorway that opens beyond this little museum into an inner sanctum, I glimpse the snowy pelt of a polar bear spread on the floor and the horns of a buffalo curling above the storekeeper's desk. Turning away, I imagine a succession of rooms opening beyond that one, gallery after gallery of corpses.

So where does the desire come from, this boy's compulsion to play at killing, this man's compulsion to kill for real? Pick your own answer. Original sin, the old mark of Cain, says a theologian. Too much testosterone, explains a biologist. Territorial imperative, insists an anthropologist. The will-to-power or the lust for death, say opposing psychologists. A historian assures us that it is all a legacy of life on the frontier. A feminist attributes it to male insecurity and the desire for sexual dominance. No, no, other pundits declare: it's television; it's food additives; it's the animal id.

"I just think playing with guns and soldiers is *fun*," says Jesse, and said the boy in me. Troubled about all this because *I* am troubled, he asks me, "What's so bad about playing war? It's all just pretend."

It *is* pretend when it starts, this toying with murder, and for most of us it remains make-believe. I swaggered around at cowboys-and-Indians, waddled about with six-shooters, shot up enemy armies, longed for and finally got my own BB gun and .22. Most of the men I knew in my childhood were hunters. Few things in life have given me more pleasure than tramping through the leafruck and dry grasses of October beside my father, on the lookout for anything covered in feathers or fur. And yet here I sit, fearing and hating every manner of weapon. If all the world's soldiers handed in their dog-tags and uniforms tomorrow, I would dance with giddy pleasure.

Many of my old playmates, those boyhood soldiers, probably feel the same. If their trigger-fingers start itching, they content themselves with blasting aliens in a video arcade, or hunting rabbits and deer on weekends. But on the day of my graduation from high school, seven of my buddies drove to Cleveland to get themselves tattoos, and on the next day they all joined the Marines, wanting to handle real guns. I met another one of those playmates years later, in England, where he was resting up at a U.S. air base before returning to Vietnam for another bout of bombing. "It's beautiful," he said, describing night raids over Hanoi, "to see those fires blooming down there like flowers and to feel this whacking great machine turn in your hands." War is hell, say the generals; but it is also heaven, say many veterans. Remembering combat, ex-warriors will tell you they have never been so alive, never so happy, since the shooting stopped.

Soldiers or not, we veterans of childhood wars carry in our innermost ears the growl of machine guns, remember in our muscles the jab of a bayonet, preserve the star-image of bursting bombs. We know all about enemies. We understand how to divide the universe into the forces of light and the forces of darkness. On the edge of sleep, our hands curl and our fingers twitch. Massacres wait in us, like the lines of plays we rehearsed long ago. If we don't enact them ourselves, we feel little surprise when someone else does. *Bang, bang, you're dead,* we sing inwardly. And somebody really dies.

—*Scott Russell Sanders*

BOOKS & AUTHORS

What Happened to Rage?

(The "Literary" Story)

The Crush, by Gary Gildner. Ecco. $11.50
Private Parties, by Jonathan Penner. Pittsburgh. $13.95

Whatever happened to rage? Shall we ever again read about characters we do not instantly recognize, committing actions of which we have at best imagined ourselves capable? If Dostoevsky were writing today, Raskolnikov would be a member of the English Department faculty. He would have an intense irrational hatred of the old woman who runs the used book store. In a climactic scene, after following the old woman to her home, under cover of darkness, he might uproot a plant growing in her front yard.

That is, unless he decided not to.

It is becoming too easy to write what we all recognize to be the contemporary literary short story. Certain conventions of characterization mark a piece as one written in our time. The characters are literate, weary, puzzled by the dissolution of their emotional lives, reluctant to feel deeply, incapable of decisive or dramatic action, live in a slightly decaying suburbia, and have affectless voices. Such stories work by seducing the reader into a conspiracy to make meaning by requiring the reader to supply the emotional states that are suggested by the understated prose. Ultimately, such stories succeed by flattering us: we feel clever to have figured out what was *really* going on, and we have been able to figure out what was going on because we ourselves are "sophisticated," which is another way of saying we have read enough of these stories to know precisely how we are supposed to feel.

The success of such stories relies on recognition—the delight we take on encountering situations and people we already know. While reading, we don't want to see the obvious belabored, and so the art of such stories requires understatement; consequently the characters themselves do very little. Understatement has so completely come to dominate our aesthetic judgments that many contemporary stories need concern themselves with only a single moment in a character's life, the kind of moment that most of us already understand to be disastrous, and in that moment readers are supposed to perceive the shape and form of entire lives. Incapable of doing much, the characters talk a lot, often as disembodied voices that address . . . well, that seem to address only themselves.

What action that does exist in these tales is fraught with significance. In the lifting of a spoon or the feeding of a dog we are supposed to recognize global importance. The reader who dares to question the motivations of the characters, who wonders just what events occurred to bring the characters to this disaster, and wonders what course of action the characters might have taken to *avoid* this disaster, instantly defines himself as "unsophisticated," possessed by an archaic sensibility: the in crowd already knows domestic disaster is a given of contemporary life. We understand lust, infidelity, and divorce in the same way medieval peasants understood plague—an inevitable supernatural visitation.

Happily, in the very best stories in *The Crush,* Gary Gildner is able to avoid tiresome familiarity. Though many of these stories are concerned with fathers, mothers, children, and the evaporation of a marriage, the finest story in that group, "The Summer of the Octopus Story," never assumes any automatic empathy from its readers. That story is obviously and totally "felt," and we are taken into it by the relentless accumulation of details. Gildner, a much published poet, is aware of the potential for sub-

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B. Paid circulation		
1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales	1907	2213
2. Mail subscriptions	2226	2068
C. Total paid circulation	4133	4281
D. Free distribution by mail, carrier or other means, samples, complimentary, and other free copies	68	52
E. Total distribution (sum of C and D)	4201	4333
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1. Office use, left-over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing	141	182
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(signature) **Robley Wilson, Jr., Editor**

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liminal effects of rhythm, and so the story begins with simple declarative sentence after simple declarative sentence—deliberately a kind of prose with all the charm of a police report. That plodding rhythm produces a narrative voice that is giving testimony to the inexplicable events of a life. But the story rises above the contemporary conventions as Gildner manipulates the language to a more complicated level and manages to create closure by having the story end with a poem. The point here, that complicated relationships cannot always be simply understood, is nicely reinforced by the style.

Gildner's title story is also a very fine piece of work. When a high school student whispers to her teacher that she has a crush on him, the teacher's life and his perceptions begin to change. The whispered confession is like the pebble dropped on top of a mountain of rubble. The avalanche strikes us as somehow disproportionate, if thoroughly understandable. We read "The Crush" and we go about looking to the cliffs above.

Other stories here are pleasantly bizarre, especially "A Replacement for Frankenthaler," which features a pet boa constrictor named Tillie. In general, Gildner's prose is lyrical, and many of the stories are set in the Midwest, so it is disappointing that a sense of the specialness of a place is so rarely rendered. The stories set in Iowa and Michigan could as easily be set in Hawaii or Texas. But this is a minor quibble for what is otherwise a fine collection of stories that exhibits a discriminating intelligence at work.

Private Parties, the winner of the 1983 Drue Heinz Literature Prize, is Jonathan Penner's first collection of short fiction. Penner is a writer who believes in telling a tale. Each of these fourteen stories has a beginning, middle, and end, and two of them—"Emotion Recollected in Tranquility" and "Men Are of Three Kinds"—actually dare to recount events that span many years. There are no isolated moments here; every story exhibits closure. Penner's characters are distinct and unique, and through the graceful writing we come to know them completely. Considering the tide of contemporary fiction that presumes the pre-existence of a certain sensibility within the reader, Penner's devotion to a narrative strategy that requires the writer to *earn* every effect is a remarkable reminder of just what fiction can make us see, feel, and understand in a new way.

The danger of such fiction is that in less skillful hands the stories risk becoming clockworks, little machines that once would up by a neat exposition run down to an inevitable, expected conclusion. But Penner is not O. Henry. There is a kind of magic in stories such as "Temblor," "Frankenstein Meets the Ant People," and "A Way of Life." That magic is worked by the absolute control of tone and point of view, and by Penner's profound understanding of how those aspects of fiction affect every nuance of craft. The result in Penner's work is a distinct sense of voice. Every detail is exactly right. Every word is exactly right. The language never draws attention to itself. We come to know these characters as much from what they do as from how they speak to us and to each other. For Penner, the "rightness" of the details and language is always a matter of what serves the fiction and characters best. This is magic with an invisible magician.

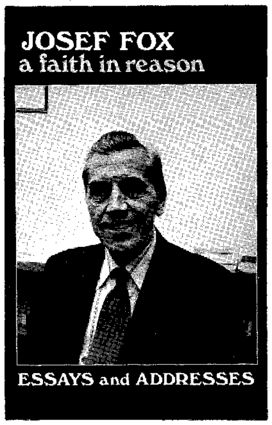
In *Private Parties* we meet a host of memorable characters. When a dog is hit by a car and the drunken driver wants to get away, Uncle Hersh lies down in the road and locks his feet around the car's drive shaft. There's a woman who has heard Arthur Godfrey say that no one can count to a million. She dedicates much of her life to typing numbers just to prove it can be done, but years later, by the time she finishes typing to a million, she no longer cares about going on TV because "Johnny Carson isn't half the person that Godfrey was." And there is an overweight out-of-work real estate agent in San Diego who takes to burglary to support his family and his gambling habit. But none of these characters seem eccentric oddities because Penner's craft allows him to give us these people whole, in a context that is at once plausible and engrossing.

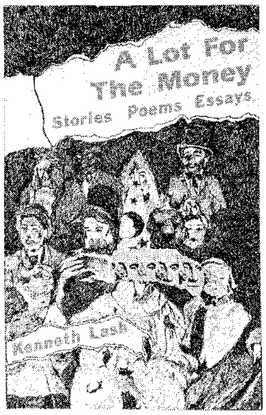
The dreary sameness that pervades so much contemporary work is absent from Penner's fiction, but that by itself does not make *Private Parties* as noteworthy an event as it is. Penner's fine eye, perfect ear, and his dexterity with language make this a collection that should be read by anyone who appreciates artful short fiction. *Private Parties* is a meticulously crafted piece of work that deserves a wide readership. —*Perry Glasser*

BOOKS FROM THE NAR

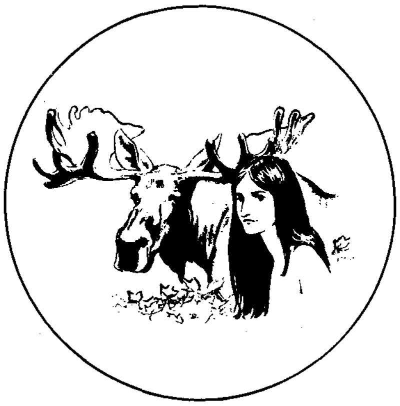
ROY R BEHRENS
ART&CAMOUFLAGE

THE HEART
NEVER FITS
ITS WANTING
stories by
Lee K. Abbott, Jr.





Melissa & McGonnegal Poster: $3.00



Bill Berry's lovely and mysterious young woman who teaches an Alaskan moose to dance the ballet. Printed in two colors on high quality stock, 23 × 35 inches, sent post-paid in a sturdy mailing tube. Text included. An ideal, light-hearted gift.

Art and Camouflage, by Roy R. Behrens: $10.95 (paper)

A succinct and lucid account of the coinciding developments of military and natural camouflage studies, Gestalt psychology, Dada, Surrealism, and the Bauhaus. Preface by Guy Davenport. Illustrated. 8½ × 11 format, 91p.

A Faith in Reason, by Josef Fox: $7.95 (paper)

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The Heart Never Fits Its Wanting: $9.95 $5.95 (paper) by Lee K. Abbott, Jr.:

Ten stories of the joy, awe, and mayhem which mark the connections between men and women. Written by a new author of comic insight. "Rowdy and yet tender, funny yet serious on the highest plane."—*Mary Oliver.* 119p. *1981 St. Lawrence Award for Fiction.*

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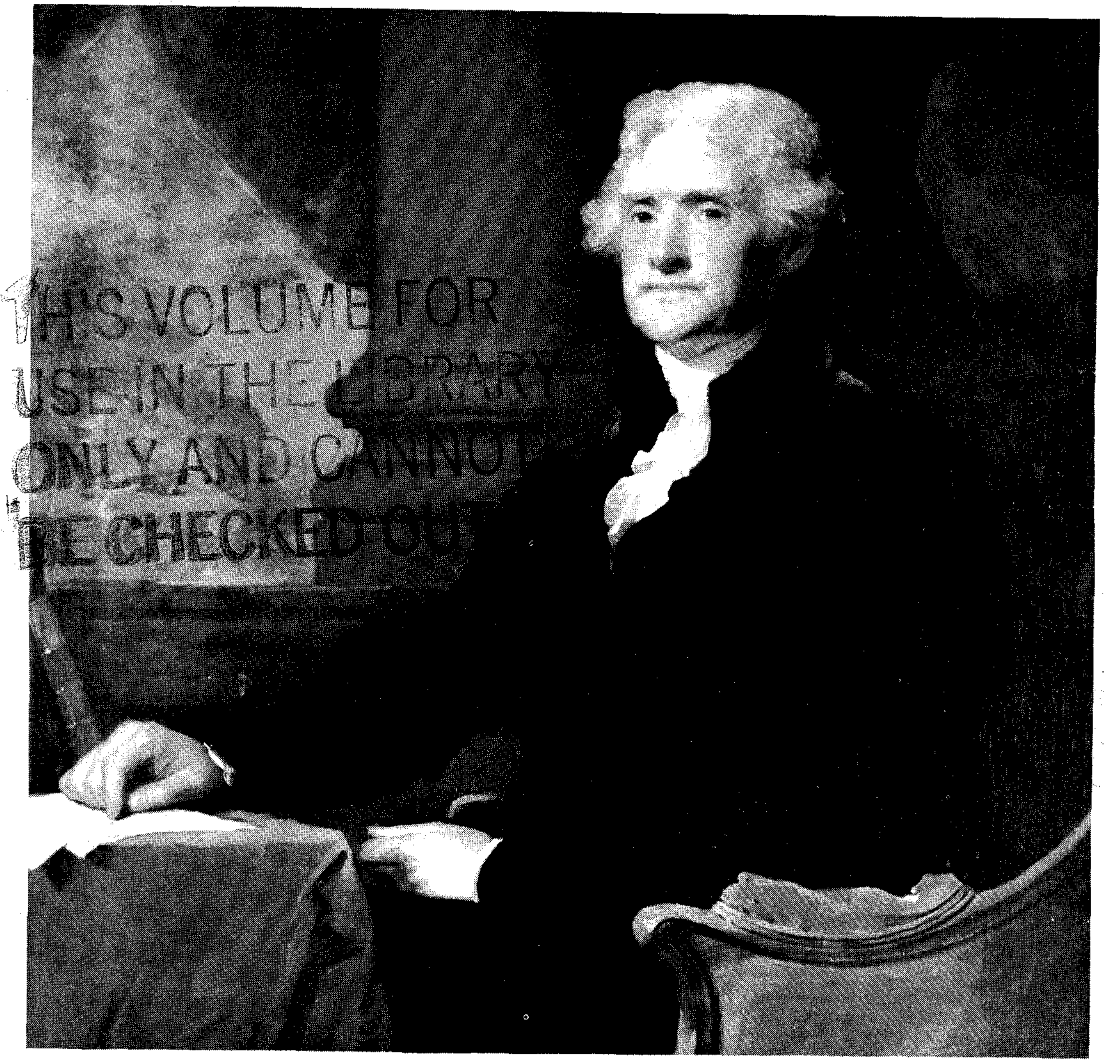

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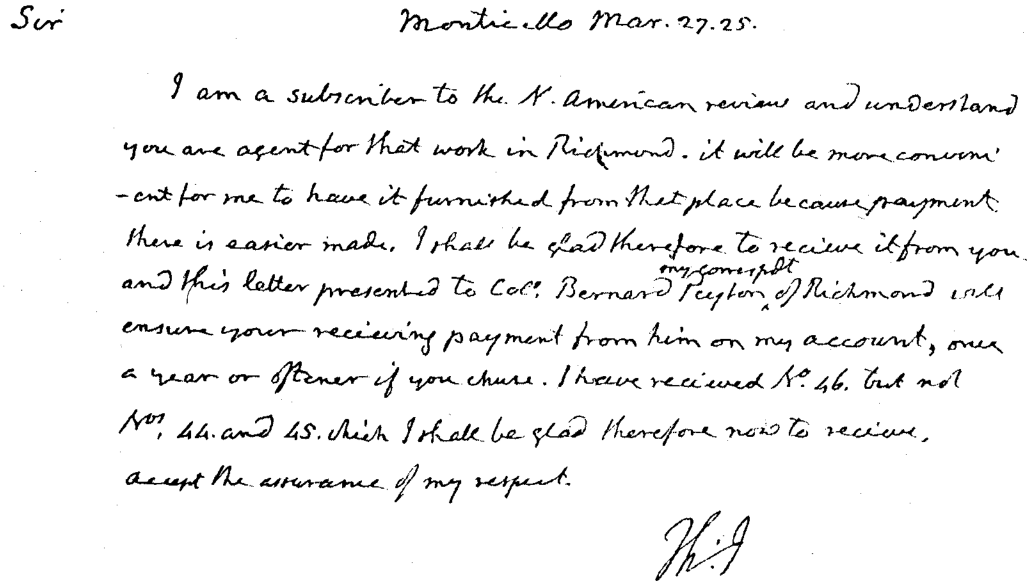

Sir Monticello Mar. 27. 25.

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